# THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES

Malcolm J. McLeod

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# The Unsearchable Riches

By

Malcolm James McLeod

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*To my Pasadena Friends;*
*Being echoes of words*
*Once delivered to them,*
*And received in patience and love.*

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# THE RICHES OF GRACE

"Unto me who am less than the least of all saints was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."—Ephesians 3:8.

# THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES

## I

## THE RICHES OF GRACE

THERE is no work equal in range or richness to the great work of the holy ministry. The New Testament gives to it a peerless, an imperishable place. "It is the best calling but the worst trade in the world," wrote Matthew Henry. Dr. Cuyler once said that no royal throne was loftier or more lustrous than the pulpit of Jesus Christ. When Dr. Carey was labouring in India, and his son, Felix, had accepted the office of ambassador to the King of Burmah, Carey said one day to a friend, "Felix has lapsed into an ambassador"; meaning that to forsake the exalted vocation of the minister for even the highest earthly court was a descent. The man who is preaching Christ is handling fabulous treasure—"unsearchable riches" our text says. He should be a man of native gifts and

commanding equipment. Not a few there are who believe that the gravest danger threatening the cause of organised Christianity to-day in America is the decline of the pulpit. Because when the pulpit declines the channel of inspiration is clogged and the fertilising river has no flow. God has entrusted His heavenly manifesto to human lips.

The history of the Church is enveloped in a blaze of pulpit glory. There are Paul and Tertullian and Chrysostom and Basil and Savonarola and Luther and Latimer and Calvin and Knox and Wyclif and Hooker and Jeremy Taylor and Baxter and Tillotson and Fénelon and Mason and Massillon and Robert South and Robert Hall and Edward Irving and Newman and Stanley and Channing and Bushnell and Spurgeon and Brooks and Matthew Simpson. What a list of immortals one can cite! These are the mountains, and there are thousands of noble hills besides. And what a gracious light they caught and threw! And when the altar fires burned low, it was because the prophets were dead. Singers, we are told, are to be pitied because posterity cannot hear them. Their art is fragile and ephemeral. Not so the preacher! He is in alliance with the heights. The truth he utters links him with the eternal. It was Henry

Ward Beecher, a preacher, who dealt slavery some of those deathblows from which it never rallied. It was Thomas Chalmers, a preacher, who made his weekly discourses one of the controlling forces of Scotland. It was Jonathan Edwards, a preacher, who made his pulpit a seat of the mighty. It was John Wesley, a preacher, who started a new era of political economy—a man by the way who, according to Carlyle, has wielded more influence in the world than any of his three great contemporaries, William Pitt, the Duke of Wellington, or Napoleon Bonaparte. Some religions rely upon the sword; some upon the state; some upon ancestor worship; some upon symbolism; but the Christian religion, from the beginning, has relied upon tongues inflamed by a burning coal from off God's altar. In the antediluvian age Moses delivered his message. In the apostolic age Paul defended his. Never at any time has prophecy ceased. It is a splendid thing to make this world livable, but it is a better thing to make the other world real, and this is the function of the prophet. Our old professor at Princeton used to say to us, "Young men, never belittle your calling." Other parts of worship have changed. The sacrifice has changed; the ritual has changed; the litanies, too, and the liturgies; but the of-

fice of the pulpit, all through the circle of the centuries, has remained virtually the same. The world outgrows its priests, but not its prophets. " It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them which believe."

Of course, preaching is a function of many forms. It is well to remember that in the New Testament there are six words translated preacher—each contributing its little touch of colouring by way of definition. There is, first, the word herald. Two of the words, in fact, mean just a herald. The third means a herald of good news—the word used in the passage before us. The fourth signifies a talker. " Jesus talked to the multitudes." The fifth, a reasoner, and the sixth, a prophet. These are the different shades which go to portray this imperial word. And it will be noted how they all concern themselves with the art of public speech. The preacher is not a priest. He is not a prelate. He is not a sacramentalist. He is not simply the " guardian of a fixed and ancient deposit." He is a voice. He is a living voice. The problem of the preacher is how to translate the things of eternity into the vocabulary of time. God endowed man with the gift of utterance that he might reveal himself. Language is his weapon. The skilful handling of words is his art. To fumble here

is an unpardonable and indefensible blunder. That great German strategist, Von Moltke, it was said, could be silent in seven languages. The man who proclaims the Word of Life ought to try to be persuasive in at least one.

Now, it may be worth while just here to pause a moment and ask the Apostle to answer a few questions for us: Who the preacher is? What are his marks? Whence his diploma? Wherefore his commission? "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." These are striking words. They are strategic. They are comprehensive. They are vital. They acquaint us with the credentials of the truly anointed. He is a man clad in the garb of humility. He is a man characterised by the gift of grace. He is a man with a message. May we pause and interrogate just what these things imply?

I. A man, first of all, clad in the garb of Humility. Unsearchable riches of grace! Untold poverty of spirit! What a startling conjunction! We marvel how the limited content of the receptacle can handle the wealth of the infinite and gracious supply. There is nothing more winsome about Paul than his great human heart. If ever there lived a man

who had the right to boast a bit, it was he. But mark his modesty. "Unto me who am less than the least." Me, a vessel of grace. The wonder of it appalled him. He felt himself a pigmy before the mountainous conception. "Unto me who am less than the least." "Less than the least." A comparative superlative! You say that is strange. Is it possible? Is it good English? No, it is not: it is not good English, and it is impossible. There cannot be anything less than the least. It is the language of the heart, not the head. This is how he felt. He would like a place—if only such a place could be—below the lowest. One hardly needs to add that this is not the temper of the age. It is not God's bounty to-day that awakens our awe. People say, "Why has this trouble come upon me?" They do not say, "Why has this blessing been conferred?" We do not marvel at the mercies any more. We do not stand in trembling bewilderment before them. We rather anticipate them. We almost murmur if we do not receive them. To-day it is our troubles that excite us with the wine of wonder. This age of ours is worried much over its sorrow, but little over its sin. Why has this affliction come? Why this calamity? Paul had more than his share of ill-fortune, but it never disturbed him. He never

said, "Why?" to his trials. It was the manifold goodness of God that evoked his surprise. No man was ever more humble than the great Apostle, and yet again one is almost tempted to doubt if ever man was more boastful. His letters are full of the personal pronoun. In this one chapter alone he uses "I" and "me" twelve times. But it was a splendid magnanimous boastfulness. His one aim was to use himself and his experience and his art and his culture and his training as a pedestal for the massive towering figure of the mighty Christ. He was unquestionably the greatest of the saints, although he places himself below the least, but it was because he was so beautifully Christ-like.

And you are not surprised. Has it not always been thus? Have not all the immortal exponents of truth been men of self-abasement? In his eighty-fourth year, John Wesley said, "I am still at school." And at almost the same age Goethe remarked, "I carry my satchel yet." Instance Luther. In studying Luther the first thing that arrests us is the bashfulness with which he shrank from his work. He said one day to the Superior, who was urging him to preach, "No, no; it is not a little thing to speak before men in the place of God." What was this but the natural recoil

of a great soul from a responsible task? Jowett tells a story of Joseph Parker. "Why did Jesus choose Judas?" Dr. Parker was once asked. "I do not know," replied the Doctor, "but I have a harder question: why did He choose me?" This it was that puzzled Paul, Why did He choose me? "Me," he exclaims, "who am less than the least." Why me? The humility of the Apostle is most engaging. It was a virtue he was ever enforcing. And, surely, no fruit of the Spirit is more inviting. We love it in our children. We love it in our friends. We admire it in the flowers—the violet, the primrose, the lily-of-the-valley, the daisy,—"wee modest crimson-tippit flower." It is a beautiful thing everywhere. In the teachings of Jesus it is the passport to power. "Whoso humbleth himself shall be exalted." He who would pray acceptably cannot use the language of merit. If merit were ours, we should not need to pray. Merit says, "Pay me that thou owest." It is a plaintiff claiming his right. Prayer says, "I am less than the least." It is a supplicant pleading acquittal. And, of course, 'tis needless to explain that the word "humility" has changed its meaning. In olden times it was a sinister word—a word of slaves. Hardly could you offer a man a greater insult than to call him humble. On the up-

turned statue of Rameses, unearthed the other day amid the ruins of Memphis, is found this inscription: "I am King of Kings. If any one wants to know how great I am let him try to surpass one of my works." That was the old appraisement. The world accepted you at your own valuation. Therefore, put the price as high as possible. Once humility was a stigma. To-day it is a compliment. Christ took the hateful word and made it honourable. It is the Christian's loveliest virtue and his crowning grace. The old order of chivalry has passed away. 'Tis the meek who are mighty now. "Blessed are the meek," said the Master. To be something in God's eyes we must be nothing in our own.

There were three words constantly on the lips of Jesus—the last, the least, and the lost. And His Lordship consists in the fact that He makes the lost to be found, the least to be greatest, the last to be first. Can a life become humble apart from God? Can a strawberry ripen without the sun? The strawberry will grow and get juice and colour; but no berry ever had its sour sap changed into sweetness without the shining of the great orb of day. It takes the whole solar system to grow a berry. And it takes the power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the mystical Trinity,

to grow a simple grace like humility. Ruskin notes that if you were to cut a square inch out of Turner's skies you would find the infinite in it. Just so the lowliest human grace is rooted in the infinite. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. Grace shows boasting to the door and bows it out.

II. He is a man characterised by the Gift of Grace. "God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble." "Unto me was this grace given." "Was"; past tense. The great Apostle to the Gentiles preached not because he was gifted oratorically. Not because he felt a joy in the holy exercise, but because he had been anointed. "To me was this grace given." The preacher may have the strength of a Hercules, the heart of a Howard, the tongue of a Cicero, the courage of a Luther, the passion of a St. Francis. He may have all these endowments and fail. Not until he is given an unction from above is he chiefly equipped for his work. His success depends not on the depth of his thought, nor the finish and sparkle of his style, but upon the baptism of his Lord. He must be sure that God has spoken to him ere he can venture to speak to others. Does he come from some university? Then he can lift us to learning. Does he come from some school of music? Then he can lift us to art.

Does he come from some parliament? Then he can lift us to politics. But if he would lift us to God, he must come from the secret of the Holy presence. He must have the fragrance of the King's garden. If he would lead us to Zion, he must know the way thither. He should wear the halo of the infinite. And this is grace. What a simple word it is! There is no word more elementary. We stumble over it on almost every page of Scripture. Truly, it is a familiar word. And yet it is not an understood word. Indeed the word is vague. It is so vague that we have well-nigh banished it from our vocabulary. "Grace does not run in the blood," we say. Be that as it may, one thing is sure—it does not run much in our modern vernacular—the reason being that we have about banished its co-relative, sin. We hear little of sin these days. The word is in danger of becoming obsolete. We have almost lost our sin-consciousness. We are not shocked by it any more. We have about forgotten how to blush. Grace is sin's catholicon. If we reject the one, we cannot long retain the other. "Where sin aboundeth grace doth much more abound."

Now, what is grace? Let us be quite sure that we are travelling on cognisant and familiar paths. It is not an æsthetic outfit. Graceful-

ness is, but not grace. It is not a mere soft sentimental emotion. It is not simply good will. It is a great tidal flow. It is the divine heart at work in the world. God's love as an energy going out to the sinner—that is grace. You know but little of village pumps here in New York. Perhaps you have never felt their primitive but interesting romance. Do you remember those old wooden handles in the country? You had to work hard to get any water, and sometimes you had first to pour water in to get any out. How different from a spring! A pump labours, but a spring bubbles. Grace is not love that is pumped out. It is love that bursts out. It is spontaneous, gushing, artesian. It is the outrush of the love of God. Love with us is a passion. Love with God is an attribute. It is the great cardinal attribute of the Divine Essence.

I walked, the other day, along the fringe of the Pacific and watched the swell and leap of the incoming tide. The air was heavy with the breath of the brine. I could feel the tonic of the invigorating breeze. I could hear the revelling roar of the onrushing wave. It was glorious. The infinite was tumbling shoreward in a flood of fulness. And I was thankful for this commentary of the mighty deep because it revealed to me something of the pulse of the

Eternal. Grace is the tide of God's love rolling toward the race and cleansing the shores of human defilement. It was said of Mozart that he brought angels down, and of Beethoven that he lifted mortals up. Jesus does both. He brings God down and He lifts man up. Grace is love reaching down; faith is love reaching up. And when the two meet and clasp, then you have the Gospel in a picture.

> "Grace taught my wandering feet
>   To tread the heavenly road;
> And new supplies each hour I meet
>   While pressing on to God."

III. He is entrusted with a message. And he must not change the message—not a diphthong of it. Can the telegraph boy change the telegram? That is not his province. The Apostle to the Gentiles is our model. Never for one moment was he in doubt as to what he ought to proclaim. It was not always pleasant or welcome. Sometimes it was most unpleasant and unwelcome. The faith, he says, was once delivered to the saints. It was not invented by them. It was handed down to them. It was delivered. Nay, stronger than that. It was "once for all" delivered—delivered, he means, in its saving and sanctifying complete-

ness. The minister is a voice. The message does not belong to him. He belongs to the message. And it comes from on high. Of what avail is a commission from man? Ours is from the King. Preaching is not man using the truth. It is truth using the man. He does not possess it. He is possessed by it. He bears the burden of a divine urgency. Ever should we be on guard lest we forget that the true minister is a prophet. Not a soothsayer; not a foreteller;—a forthteller. He is not moving away over there in the vague thin realm of the remote. He is living right here in the thick of the present. He deals with the twentieth century, not the twenty-first. He is a man of his age. He is a living voice. He speaks for God. He is the interpreter of God. His office is possible only on the basis of a revelation. He is the exponent of a commission.

And what is the commission? Note carefully again the wording, please. "That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Now, that is an unsearchable sentence. I cannot explore it. It is beyond me. The descriptive word in it is a rare word. It means literally—"Not to be tracked by footprints." It is found only in one other place in the New Testament—in

Romans. " How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out." " Past finding out!" The figure is oceanic. " His way is in the sea and His path in the great waters and His footsteps are not known." I was down at the ocean a few months ago, and one morning I was telling my little ones a story. I took them in my arms and we were looking out over the water. I was reconstructing the old story we used to hear when we were children, incorporating ever and anon some additional misfortunes. Two little boys jumped into a boat. They lifted the sails and started off. Away it went bounding over the waves. They sailed for hours, and when they decided to come home they did not know how to turn it, and so they just had to sail on and on—all night, through the dusk and the dark and the swish into the dawn; all next day; two days, three, four; a week, two weeks, three, four, till at last they landed—this time in China. They had some thrilling adventures with the Chinamen when they went ashore. But, after all, what impressed them most was the bigness of the mighty ocean. My little girl exclaimed, " It isn't that big, is it, papa?" A great preacher tells us that the first time he crossed to Liverpool he was humming Faber's hymn all the way over:

"There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea."

The vastness of the mighty deep gripped him, overwhelmed him. Well, that is the figure. Unknowable, unmeasurable, unfathomable, indefinable, unsearchable. I linger on the word and revel in its richness. You cannot search what is unsearchable. The stronger the telescope, the greater the galaxy of luminous wonders. And the stronger the faith, the more inscrutable the wealth of His boundless grace. Rich! Aye, infinitely rich. Rich because it enriches. It takes the prisoner and frees him. It takes the leper and cleanses him and clothes him and crowns him. Salvation is the joyful word. It is the theme of every book in the Bible. It is the making of a man sound and whole and vigorous and virtuous. And never must we allow ourselves to forget that the riches of His grace means the riches of His love. It was the first truth we memorised at mother's knee. And, *mirabile dictu,* it is the truth men are doubting to-day. To-day it has become the very storm citadel of our faith. A hostile criticism is attacking it. God love us? How can He? they say. Why should He? He is so mighty and we are such mites. Just frail, weak, foolish bundles of dust! How can He bother about us? How can He hold us in His

heart? We are always wondering how it can be. And yet it is the very rock-bottom fundamental of our immortal message.

> "Yes, for me, for me He careth
> With a brother's tender care."

This, then, is the wealthy content of the Apostle's gracious message. Surely, we need to put on the mantle of humility and to pray most earnestly for the heavenly gift of grace. For, to tell such tidings must be an unspeakable and inspiring privilege. Catholics claim that it is a very solemn thing when the priest consecrates wafer and wine. In such sacramentalism, of course, we do not share. But we do share in the faith that consecrates heart and voice and lip and tongue and puts these organs in tune with the divine, so that the message may be transmitted in its crystal completeness; and this, surely, is full as solemn and serious a transaction. If we preach the riches of culture we are competing with the college, and the college has the advantage. If we preach the riches of literature we are coping with the magazines, and the magazines can beat us. But if we preach the riches of Jesus, we have no rivalry. It is a great, holy, blessed, wonderful monopoly. Salvation for the last and the

least and the lost. The pulpit is not a classroom, not a lecture bureau, nor a forum for debate. No one looks pulpit-ward these days for instruction in biology or botany or dramatic art. There are experts for these things. The minister is the exponent of the spiritual life. To be faithful here is to stand in the apostolic order. It is not a little local work; it is a world work. The preacher ought to be a man with a world vision. He should think in world-terms. His message covers the whole stretch and area of human life.

They are telling us, forsooth, to-day that the old story is out-of-date, that it has lost its power. A great professor recently stated that he had created life by chemical action, and many columns of wisdom were written to show how the old faith was crumbling at our feet. Professor Drew of the University of Berlin delivered a lecture this last winter in which he claimed that Jesus never lived—he was mythical. It will be remembered that Archbishop Whately once wrote a treatise called "Historic Doubts Concerning Napoleon," in which he proved that if we adopt the method of the German neologists, Napoleon never lived. A liberal minister said the other day in our hearing, "I spell my God with two o's, and my devil without a d—good and evil." Let us be

perfectly frank. We spell our God Jesus. He is the Eternal Logos. He is not simply a rare spiritual genius who "lures to brighter worlds and leads the way." He is the way. He is our Redeemer, Saviour, Master, Lord. We do not admire Him; we adore Him. I may be old-fashioned, but I confess I do not want my faith "whittled down to a few moral platitudes which no one ever dreamed of denying." I do not want my Saviour put in a row with the rest, with Socrates and Seneca and Buddha and Aurelius. For there is no row and there is no rest. He is apart, alone, far away. He is not to be lauded: He is to be loved. He is not to be encored: He is to be worshipped. He is not to be respected: He is to be revered. Who is this King of Glory? Christ of Calvary—He is the King of Glory. The message is old. Verily, indeed, it is. But, then, so is gravity, so is light, so is life. All truth is old. There is nothing new under the sun but good and evil, and they are as old as the race. Humanity is old: personality is new. Time is old: the morning is new. The rain is old: the rainbow is new. The sun is old: the sunbeam is new. No one thinks of light as an obsolete institution. The Atonement is old: the Crucifixion is new. All abiding things are old. The hills are old, the sea is old, the stars are old.

And I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for one reason, because it is old. It has stood the test of time and it has stood it well. Time writes no wrinkles on its unaging brow. When George Frederick Watts was offered a baronetcy, he wrote to a friend, "Tell Mrs. Maud that the only title I will take is the one she gave me, 'the painter of eternal things.'" The preacher is the painter of eternal things, unsearchable things, indescribable things. "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

# THE RICHES OF THE MESSENGER

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."—Revelation 22:13.

II

## THE RICHES OF THE MESSENGER

THESE are the words of our ascended Lord in Paradise. He calls Himself the Alpha and Omega of all things. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; Alpha and alphabet being related roots. What a strange and puzzling thing is the alphabet of any language! How unintelligible and grotesque to us seem the twisted shapes of some unknown Oriental tongue! How we stand bewildered and blank before the hieroglyphics of the Chinese! And our letters are full as strange and bedarkening to him as his dots and dashes are to us. Only the expert linguist can decipher sense in the development of this vague world of wonder. He takes us back into the twilight of the race, and rummages among the sticks and stones and strings and lines and outlines, and sounds and echoes and gestures, and dreams and superstitions, and rustling leaves and creaking doors, and shows us how, by a curious evolution, these crooks and curves have come to have a mean-

ing. Mark that old Moabite stone. Two men are standing by it. To the one it is nothing but blots and scrawls and senseless scribble; to the other, who is a Phœnician, it is a precious treasure, for these are the marks of his mother-tongue.

The alphabet is the symbol of the world's infancy. It is the simple intuitive gesture of the tribal childhood. It is the race struggling to express itself in understandable ways. What are letters? A vowel, for instance? A vowel is simply a vocalisation of the breath. A consonant? A consonant is closer, the result of an audible friction. And yet unto what a marvellous ultimate have these elemental things attained! What records, what volumes, what tales, what songs, what ballads, what lyrics, what poems, what philosophies! There are twenty-six symbols in our Anglo-Saxon tongue. Give them the right arrangement, as Caird in his great theistic argument puts it, and you have "the masculine reality of Chaucer"; another arrangement and the Faërie Queen trips lightly before you; another disposition, and lo! there is the noble, stately music of Milton. Group the vowels in a different order and you have the ocean roll of Byron. One more marshalling and Shelley spreads his wings; still another assortment and

we catch the soft, liquid, meadow-lark note of Keats. Truly, it is a strange and fascinating and endless study. When Professor Huxley pondered the eight simple notes of the octave he prophesied the imminent sterility of music, lamenting the not-far-distant day when there would be no more new tunes. But the prophecy was short-sighted. The outflow of melody is rich and soothing and sweet as ever. The combinations are infinite. And the possibilities of literature are even more exhaustless. For it has a greater capital to begin with. There are no boundaries to the empire of letters. It is past and far away beyond defining.

Our blessed Lord in glory uses this metaphor to describe His own eternal preëminence. " I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." He is Alpha and Omega and all the letters between. He is lead and hydrogen and all the elements between. He is red and violet, the beginning and end of the spectrum, and all the colours between. He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. He is before all things. " For by Him were all things created that are in Heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or principalities or dominions or powers." He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, and for

Him and by Him and through Him all things consist. Let us follow this thought out into some of religion's most important departments.

I. It is true first of all of Revelation. Jesus Christ is the Revealer. He is the Alpha and Omega of the revealed word. No one understands Revelation till he has approached it through the Christ. Without Christ the Bible is an enigma, the darkest kind of an enigma. The book does not explain the man, the man explains the book. He is the key to it. "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." Every manuscript in the sacred canon, with but one or two exceptions, contains some reference to the Messiah. His portrait is on well-nigh every page. Every line converges on Him. Not only have we His biography by the four Evangelists. We also have a prophetic life in the prophecies of the Old Testament and again a post-resurrection life in the Acts of the Apostles. "Ye search the scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life, and these are they which bear witness of Me." Jesus Christ is the Alpha of the Bible. That is to say, He is the first letter of the alphabet of Christianity. "In the beginning was the

Word." And He is the Omega; He is the last letter. "Even so come Lord Jesus."

Revelation begins with Him and ends with Him. He is in fact Himself the revealed Word. "The Word was with God and the Word was God." The great imperative challenge of the New Testament is not that we believe in the facts it presents, but that we believe in the person it portrays. His personality makes His history. The book did not call Him into being; He called the book into being. He gives unity and coherence to all the mixed and, much of it, crude material. He is what the heart of the people felt after and finally found. He did what He did because He was what He was. He is the first because He is the last, and He is the last because He is the first. He is the Logos that was in the beginning, and He is the Lamb that looms large at the close. Just as the alphabet is at the fountain of all our literature, so He is at the root of well-nigh every utterance in the sacred writings.

II. He is the Alpha and Omega of Righteousness. There are scholars to-day who are endeavouring to found a system of morals independent of the Christian religion. They are trying to discover a wholesome livable code of conduct apart from Jesus Christ.

The Italian minister of education, Credaro,

made a speech in Venice last summer. These are a few of his words: "Modern democracy must find some moralising substitute for religion, since this is losing its hold on the people. To what shall we look? There is only one place to look, and that is to art and the artistic sentiment. Here lies the source of order, peace, unity, vision, purity, love." This is a somewhat popular appeal to-day. These men want the Ten Commandments—the most of them at least—but they want them anonymously. They would incorporate a good deal of the Sermon on the Mount into their ethical scheme, but they would dismiss the author. Because they say a holy life does not any longer need the stimulus of a personal religious faith. It was useful once, perhaps, in the childhood of the race, but we have outgrown it. It is a hindrance rather than a help to-day. It is tangled up in a mythology which has become incredible.

And it must be confessed that they fortify their ground with some remarkable illustrations. Look, they appeal to us, at the men of this type we can assemble. Some of them are positivists, some are secularists, some are atheists, all are agnostics as far as a spiritual faith is concerned; but their lives are clean and wholesome and blameless and sincere. They measure up well to any of the finest of your

Christian communion. There are John Morley and Edmund Gosse and Ernst Haeckel and Frederic Harrison and Robert Blatchford and Maurice Maeterlinck and a multitude of minor prophets, whose names we cannot stop to recall. But the claim is far from convincing. Are not these very men, in a sense, the product of a Christian agriculture? Was not the soil in which they grew a Christian soil? The atmosphere they breathed, was it not a Christian atmosphere? How much of their wealth do they owe to a Christian environment? Is it possible to separate the river from its banks and its tributaries—and its source? The tree is rooted in the ground and the ground contributes everything to the tree. To boast of independence here were vain and idle boasting. And furthermore great beliefs make great men. This pragmatic test is always a safe criterion. But we must be quite certain that the substance is free from admixture. It is not always easy to eliminate the forces that may be unconsciously operative. Is it not a well-known fact that sometimes a plant will live on for years after its life-giving sustenance is withdrawn, just as the momentum of the engine keeps it moving after the steam is shut off? The instance of the California Sequoia brought to the London Exposition of 1857, is

a case in point. It was stript of its bark, and a facsimile of the big Redwood was erected in the Crystal Palace. Now no tree can live for long without its bark, but though sixty years have come and gone the giant trunk in the Santa Cruz valley is still erect; which means that it had such an accumulated surplus of vitality within it, that it has been able to postpone disintegration and will continue to do so, no doubt, for many years to come. Its tenacity is a matter of transmitted impulse. The lime tree of Nürnberg and the chestnut at the foot of Mount Etna are similar cases in point. Their trunks are honeycombed with decay. But they are still clinging to life and braving the tempests. The effect does not always cease the instant the cause is withdrawn. The afterglow remains with its lingering loveliness long after the sun has gone down, but nevertheless it was the great orb of day that flung the picture on the wall of the west, and held it there a little to lift us into ecstasy and rapture and delight.

That was a remarkable testimony of Mrs. Besant's when she recently expressed her disappointment that agnostics had done so little for humanity, and went on to say that those of them who did come forward to help were mostly those who, like herself, had been nur-

tured in the Christian enclosure. Herbert Spencer's father was a Wesleyan non-conformist, and although he withdrew from that body he was to the end of his days a deeply devout man. David Hume has been called the prince of agnostics, but his old mother was a saint of the Susanna Wesley type. Professor Huxley, in his famous tilt with Dr. Wace, used these words: "I was brought up in the strictest school of Evangelical Orthodoxy." Tom Paine had been a Methodist preacher in London before coming to America in 1774. Renan, it is well known, was educated for the priesthood; Pierre Loti is a free-thinker, but he sprang from Huguenot stock. Matthew Arnold was somewhat of an iconoclast, but under all his intellectual negations there is a solid base of inherited religious conviction. Nietzsche says that "Christianity is the one great curse, the one intrinsic depravity." And yet Nietzsche's father and grandfather were Lutheran clergymen. He had been brought up in the parsonage and from childhood had been surrounded by a New Testament influence. Does this count for nothing? Can it be dropped as a zero item from the equation? Why, the man had been soaked in Evangelical truth. He is literally dripping with it. The crimson colour of it was in his very blood; the scarlet thread was in

every fibre of his flesh. Such men are living largely on the splendid inheritance received from the past. A building will sometimes stand a long time after it is undermined. The Jesuits have compiled for us their "Acta Sanctorum" with its twenty-five thousand lives, among them such names as Loyola, Francis Xavier, Salmeron, Peter Faber, but we must challenge the right of Jesuitism to claim the exclusive culture of these saints. We deny, indeed, any large or important share in the gracious development. There are beautiful flowers to be found off on the hillside: that is true, no doubt, but it is also true that he who would pluck a sixteen-petalled chrysanthemum does not turn to the hillside for it. We are not denying that an occasional vine grows without the hedge instead of in the vineyard. There are some saintly names in the Confucian philosophy. Heathen Greece and Rome produced some magnificent types. What stars in the night are Socrates and Seneca and Aurelius! There are exceptional leaders like Lincoln who never went to college and but little to school; exceptional artists like Burns; exceptional preachers like Moody and Bunyan. But it is never safe, nor is it scientific, nor is it wise to formulate a theory of life from the exceptional.

And the point we are pressing is that Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega of righteousness. He is the world's standard of excellence. He is the unit of measurement, the one ultimate appeal. He is back of every upward impulse. Our very conception of virtue is Christian. What would this man do? That is the infallible test of action. What does this man say? It is final; the discussion is closed. "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old, but I say unto you." No one would think to-day of taking Plato's Republic as his pattern state. We have outgrown it. Parts of it are cruel, parts are absurd. But Christ's ideal of righteousness is our norm of conduct still. There is no righteousness like the righteousness of Jesus. It is incomparable; it is searching; it is probing; it is radical; it is absolute; it is burning; it is comprehensive; it is unconditional. It is so complete and compelling that every student of holiness uncovers in its presence. "Venice," says a traveller, "is like nothing but itself." Christ is like no one but Himself. He is not one of a chorus: He is alone. He is insensible to sin, and that in another is the greatest sin. True, there are critics who find courage to pick flaws in His character; not many it is true, just a few, but as a rule they are not answered. They are pitied

rather. They are listed with such as argue that Abraham Lincoln was a demagogue. Because, no matter what criticism thinks, He satisfies the conscience of the race. Some things are settled forever, and one is the character of Jesus Christ. Our conscience agrees that if God were to live on this earth, His life would be just what the life of this man was. John Morley tells us he might say some things derogatory if he wanted to, but he will refrain. One can hardly conceive a finer tribute to the Son of Mary than that. When an enemy knows something discreditable he will not divulge, there surely must be some reverent reason for the silence. A modern reformer made the astounding statement the other day that Jesus would have accomplished more for humanity had He worked for science and economics rather than religion. But we will not pause to appraise that irresponsible deliverance, save to make the sweeping claim, by way of answer, that His name to-day is at the back of everything that is best in the uplift of the race. From the moral fund of the world subtract what Christianity has contributed and the remainder would be pitifully minute.

And this singular man is no sentimental dreamer. He is no weak, pallid, effeminate figure. He is a strong, all-round man, sym-

metrical in every dimension. The righteousness of the Christ is a universal righteousness. Nothing is excepted. Nothing is exaggerated. It embraces all the fruits of the spirit in the most pleasing proportions. It comprises the beautiful as well as the true and the good. No victor in the old Olympic games was permitted to have his statue modelled until he had been victorious in all the five forms of contest. Because to be successful in three or four might imply that certain lines of the body were abnormal. And as a perfect physique was the aim of the Greek athlete, there must be no disproportion. The founder of Christianity fulfils every measurement. There is no aspect of perfect manhood He does not satisfy. He is enthusiastic without being fanatical, emotional without being hysterical, imaginative without being visionary. We have two limbs for walking, but if one were to grow an inch longer than the other we should limp. The noticeable thing about Jesus is His freedom from limp, the perfect equilibrium of His nature. He has power, but at the same time He has restraint. He has a will of steel; He has a heart of wax. He is inflexibly just and, at the same time, graciously generous. He is preëminently Spiritual, but all the while perfectly natural. He is not one letter of the alphabet. He is

every letter. He is the classic, the finished poem of character.

And there is no righteousness like the righteousness He inspires. In fact, I was going to observe that there is no righteousness but the righteousness He inspires. Men are more and more looking at things from Christ's angle and accepting His valuation of them. The modern world to-day, in so far as it is a good world, is almost entirely the creation of Jesus Christ. There are instances on record of men who have started out to climb the heights to the Celestial City and found that before they had gone far on the march they were drawing nearer to this man. He is the starting point and the goal of every earnest pilgrim toward purity—the Alpha and the Omega. And He is at home everywhere. He belongs to the world, not a little corner of it. There is nothing provincial. In Him are no racial distinctions. He is not the child of His age. He is the child of every age. People clamour for an up-to-date gospel. The plea is belittling. Jesus is above dates. He cannot be tied down to any detachment of time. There is something timeless and eternal about Him, without beginning, without end, Alpha and Omega, first and last. How striking the fact that every advocate of a new cult to-day is claiming Jesus.

He feels that he can win no converts without the Galilean. Quite recently a Nihilist was addressing a meeting in Trafalgar Square and the gist of his address was that Jesus was a Nihilist. We saw a report of a meeting of liquor men in New York City last winter, and the speaker was claiming that if Jesus Christ were living to-day He would vote to have saloons open on Sunday. Every candidate for popular favour quotes Jesus on moral questions. The truth that is in Secularism is the truth Jesus preached. The truth that is in Positivism is the truth He taught His disciples. Mark, He did not say, I am true. What He said was infinitely greater. "I am the truth." There is an astronomical divide between saying I am true and I am the truth. Jesus Christ is true, but He is infinitely more. He is the truth. He is its embodiment, its expression, its expansion, its completion, its finality, its enforcement, its Alpha and Omega. "This is My beloved Son, hear Him."

III. And He is the Alpha and the Omega, once more, of Redemption. He is the alphabet and the poem of Redemption—the preface and the finale. As the writer of the Hebrews put it, "He is the author and the finisher of our faith." Freely He came and fully He finished the work the Father gave Him to do.

He and He alone can take out of the heart the pride, the passion, the selfishness, and the sin. Redemption is the core of His message. That He gave Himself as a sacrifice is not a limb of the gospel. It is the heart of the gospel. It is the first prophetic utterance in the Bible. "It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel." And it is the last ascription of praise "unto Him that loveth us and washeth us from our sins—to Him be the glory." Paul in his letter to the Colossians says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. For all things were created by Him and for Him." And the writer to the Hebrews says, "But we see Jesus tasting death for every man. For it became Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." "To make Him perfect." Aye, and to make us perfect. A young man once went to hear Hugh Price Hughes preach. When he returned his father asked him about the sermon. "He made me feel," said the young man, "that it was not necessary for me ever to sin again." This is the glory and uniqueness of Jesus. He makes the feeling to be a fact. He removes the curse and the stain and the power and the love of sin. At the same time that He reveals to us our lamen-

table need, He discloses His own infinite and gracious supply.

I said to an old gentleman once, as he lay dying, "Well, Mr. Merwin, you have lived a beautiful life; you have served the Master some forty years or more." It was the first time I ever saw him ruffled, the remark displeased him so. "No, no," he whispered, "I want a robe a little whiter than my own; mine's sadly stained."

"Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

And now let us each make to our hearts the great appeal. Is He the Alpha and Omega of our lives? Because these are His ironclad conditions. If we are His followers, what He demands is complete allegiance. Once He was born in a stable, but when He is born into our hearts He declines every room but the best. "He claims the bridal chamber." That is our Master's imperial imperative challenge. May it be the joy of all of us gladly to respond.

"For we do not crown Him Lord at all
Unless we crown Him Lord of all."

"Yea thro' life, thro' death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning,
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed;
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

# THE RICHES OF THE MESSAGE

"And when He had opened the book He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."—Luke 4:18.

III

## THE RICHES OF THE MESSAGE

THE man is Jesus. The place is Nazareth. He is in the synagogue, the temple where He had always worshipped, and among the young men and maidens with whom, for thirty years, He had played and companied.

The first time a young student fills the pulpit in the home of his boyhood, is to him a memorable moment. Only those who have passed through the ordeal know how memorable it is. To stand up before the playmates of your childhood, to be the object of their searching and curious regard, to be eyed—well, we were going to say—as a criminal is; to see before you father and mother and kinsman and those who, in boyhood's days, have been your guides and teachers; and then to withdraw yourself from, and forget, the interesting assemblage and feel God's presence alone—that is a task before which some of us have paled and quailed and no doubt failed. How distinctly and sharply the writer can recall his own experience! How vividly it all returns! the hymns, the an-

them, the sermon, the faces, the handshakes, the congratulations, and especially the remark, at the close, of the old Scotch elder who knew intimately the family history, as he gripped our hand in strong, farmer-like fashion, " Well, ma boy, I was a-pityin' ye all over."

Jesus is in Nazareth—His home. He goes to church, as is His custom. He enters the pulpit and reads the appointed portion of the prophetic writings for the day, " The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And He closed the book and sat down, and then began to say unto them, " To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears." What a wealthy and wondrous announcement! It is a crown of shining and costly jewels. Together they constitute, as it were, the diadem of His royal authority. Let us fix our eyes for a little upon the splendour. Let us take down each separate gem and study it, examining it in the light of His gracious ministry. And it will be observed at the first glance that the speaker claims to have been ordained for His divine and holy mission. Like

the prophets and priests and kings of the old economy, He was anointed at the commencement of His public career. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of His roots, and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding." It was thus that the Master was equipped and set apart for His work. And not otherwise is it with those whom He sends forth now anew. It will be remembered that, after having taught His own disciples for three years, His last instruction was, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." God wants anointed preachers. Never was there so clamant a call for them as to-day. The ministry is not a human avocation; it is a divine vocation. The pulpit needs university graduates, but it needs Holy Ghost graduates immeasurably more. Alas! the crying lack to-day of the sacred calling, be it said with a sting of sorrow, is unction, and no college can confer that; no seminary can bestow it; no schools of divinity can put it into their curriculums. It comes from on high. It is saved men that God uses still to save men. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world. "Yes," said Mackay of Uganda, "but the fingers of that hand are consecrated fingers."

I. The first jewel in the crown is what the Evangelist terms "Good News." "Glad Tidings," Isaiah calls it. A bright and lustrous stone! Not something flat and stale and lifeless; something fresh and flashing, rather: News! Good News! The world had never known the like before. For it was a communication of grace. And that, to begin with, was a novel thing. Every message that the heart of man had heard hitherto had been a message of merit of some kind or other. Do so and so. Work out the problem yourself. Go forth on some dusty pilgrimage. Crucify, purify, gratify. This has been the insistent heresy of the ages. Earn the blessing. It has been the most tenacious half-truth of religious history: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling!" But stopping there is the flat denial of the Evangel. For the gift of God is eternal life, and only that can be worked out which He hath worked in. Self-reliance is the last word of paganism; God-reliance is the first word of Christianity.

And the gift is for the poor. Here was another fresh line of departure. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Verily, the world had never heard such unearthly announcement. "To the poor the

gospel is preached." Not the poor in purse, however, it is imperative to remember. There is more preaching to the rich in the Bible than to the poor. Ruskin notes that almost all of the New Testament parables are for the rich. The rich young man was told to go and sell all that he had. The parable of the unjust steward relates to the proper use of wealth. So of Dives and Lazarus. So with the treasure hid in the field. So likewise of the parable of the pounds. The Great Teacher is ever warning His hearers against the sin of the non-use or the misuse of a trust. Indeed, the Christian Church is beginning to feel that the rich need the gospel to-day fully more than the poor. The godless rich is becoming a very touching tragedy. In one of the English Men of Letters' series, Mr. Edmund Gosse deals with the life of Jeremy Taylor. And speaking of his remarkable sermons Mr. Gosse says that the absence in them of any reference to the life of the poor is a singular fact. Jeremy Taylor preached to an aristocratic congregation in London. Within a stone's throw of his church there was the most aggravated poverty, but the great divine never once alluded to it. And, says Gosse, by way of criticism, "Is it not a very curious thing that a representative of the meek and lowly Nazarene, in his vision of the

world, should see only well-to-do people?" Edmund Gosse is right. His criticism is correct. It is, surely, not the mind of the Master. To Jesus there is no rich, there is no poor. He moves among men as a physician does. The true physician knows nothing of circumstances. He knows only suffering. He goes where there is sorrow and pain and need. The thrilling climacteric note in the Evangel of Jesus is that it is for all, and for all alike. His message is not for democrats, aristocrats, or plutocrats. Some there are who claim that the Nazarene was a great social reformer, that He came to be the champion of labour against capital. But the claim on its face must be false. For did He not Himself deny that His mission was to set friends at variance? He came not to pit class against class, but to fuse and weld together in a compact and loving brotherhood. Many shall come from the East and from the West, from the North and from the South, and shall sit down under the banner of the Nazarene. No, Jesus belongs to no class. He was poor, but He does not belong to poverty. He was the root and the offspring of David, but He does not belong to royalty; He was a carpenter, but He does not belong to labour; He was a Jew, but He does not belong to Judea; He was divine, but He does not be-

long to divinity; He calls Himself the Son of Man; that is to say, He belongs to humanity.

The gospel has no favourites. There is no partiality in its gifts. They are all free. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come." No one is suppressed, no one particularly is expressed. Its password is "whosoever." True, no doubt, it finds its heartiest welcome among the poor. It makes its greatest conquests there. Its proudest laurels are found, as a rule, among the lowly—the lowly in circumstance. Personally I believe the strongest churches in our land to-day are not the rich churches. Contrariwise, indeed, not infrequently they are the very poor churches. When Watts was once asked to paint a picture of a dead church, it will be remembered he did not paint a little country chapel in decay. It was a handsome city edifice with stained-glass windows and rich upholstery and bronze choir loft that the artist drew. A magnet will lift pins and nails and rusty iron, but it has no affinity for pearls or diamonds, or gold or silver. The gospel is a magnet, but not, it would seem, for the magnates of this world. Mr. Beecher called the reign of Christ the reign of the common people. And it is the common people still who hear Him gladly. And is it not the grandest possible tribute to the Man that He continues to draw, as in the

days of His flesh, the simple-hearted to His feet? Is it not the crowning glory of our religion that it throws a halo on the field where the workingman toils, that its splendour lights up the grey lives of men in their drab and sober routine? Jesus, I repeat, belongs to humanity. He is the universal *homo*. His gospel is for the poor, the poor in spirit. This shuts out neither wealth nor culture; it bars neither bond nor free. Many there are, to be sure, who possess this world's goods in abundance who yet are lowly in spirit,—and great, no doubt, will be their reward.

> "Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
> An humble and a contrite heart."

And this thrives best in the soil of poverty. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the gospel, theirs is the glory, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

II. Another precious stone in the coronet of our King is healing, health, wholeness. He comes to heal the broken-hearted. He comes to make men whole. The doctor can set a broken bone, but who hath skill to knit a broken heart? Let us attend unto the Psalmist: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart: Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.

He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken." Or again: "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." Or once more: "He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds." How full of ointments and liniments and balms of every virtue Nature is! How she loves to restore! How she comes not to destroy, but to fulfil! Fracture a rib, or sprain a muscle, or bruise a nerve, and Nature is on the scene long before the surgeon. No sooner is the mischief done than she begins her kindly ministry of repair. What a marvellous germicide is the sunshine! What vigour on the mountain top! What a tonic in the salt sea air! What virtue in the groves of eucalyptus and pine! And if Nature can heal the body cannot the Lord of Nature energise the spirit? Yes, Jesus is a physician. Well has He been termed the "Great Physician." It is thus that He describes Himself. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." He comes not to those that are well, but to those who are ill. When on earth His great mission was to heal, and 'tis His supreme function still. "The sun of righteousness hath arisen with healing in His wings." He can heal all manner of diseases as in the days of His flesh, but His ministry is primarily

spiritual to-day. A specialist He in soul-invalidism.

Last spring a man came to our official board one evening to present himself for church membership. Knowing something of his record, we were all more than a little surprised. Indeed, one of the officials was so agreeably astonished that he ventured, "And what led you to think of the step, Mr. Voorhies?" His answer was brief, but we understood: "I had a beautiful little flower in my garden," he began, "but the Lord came with His shears," and here his voice trembled and the sentence was left unfinished. Are you carrying a wounded and broken heart? Let me say that your broken heart may be healed. It can be restored,—"He restoreth my soul." There is no sorrow He cannot soothe; there is no fever He cannot allay. John G. Paton, the Missionary to the New Hebrides, tells us in his Autobiography of the death of his young wife and her baby. He tells us how, with his own hands, he dug their graves alongside the little cabin, and then made a border around it with blocks of white coral. And the spot became to him a shrine where he claimed the New Hebrides for God. Then he concluded that most pathetic chapter with these words, "But for Jesus and His fellowship I

should have gone mad." "All our troubles come back laughing," said the old divine, "when we bring them to the Cross." "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." This is the heartening promise, but must we push its fulfilment entirely into the future afar? Is there not a partial satisfaction for to-day? One of the saddest confessions in literature is Richard Jeffries', in "The Story of My Heart." "For grief there is no consolation. It is useless to fill our hearts with bubbles. A loved one is gone, and as to the future—it is unknown. To assure ourselves otherwise is to soothe the mind with illusions. There is no consolation. There is no relief. There is no hope certain; the whole system is a mere illusion. I, who hope so much, and am so rapt up in the soul, know full well that there is no certainty." How sad! How dark! How grave-like! What gloom! How at variance with the teachings of Him who said, "Let not your heart be troubled." "I am the Light of the World." "I am the Resurrection and the Life." "I am the bright and morning star!" "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

III. There is another illuminating word in this series that throws light at a diversity of

angles—the word liberty. "To preach deliverance to the captives"—captives, of course, to sin. The mischief of sin is its captivating power. It establishes a mastery over us. Each act is a spider's thread, but the cumulative strength is that of a cable. Gulliver fell asleep in the land of the Lilliputians. An army of the little fellows no larger than one's finger came and bound him with gossamer strings, but in the end he was a prisoner. Sin is slavery! Salvation is deliverance! "I am with thee to deliver thee," says Jeremiah. "Our God is able to deliver, and will deliver," insists Daniel. "Who gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world," writes the great Apostle to the Gentiles. And in his last words of counsel to Timothy he exclaims, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me into His heavenly Kingdom."

Mr. Harold Begbie has given us a book which he calls "Broken Earthenware," and by "Broken Earthenware" he means the cracked, mutilated jars that have been picked up from the waste heap and mended and made serviceable for the king. It is a marvellous tribute to the power of Christianity to save and redeem and transform and restore. For, in our study of comparative religions let us never

forget one thing, viz., that no other religion ever even entertains the idea of making a broken vessel new. The book is the story of a series of present-day miracles. It tells of the work done by a beautiful, delicate young girl—a Salvation Army lassie—who threw herself into the very wickedest part of London, among the roughs and toughs, to labour for her Master. And the volume is a simple narrative of nine of the jewels that she found and polished for her crown. Let us just instance one—the first one cited. He is called the Puncher. He was a prize-fighter by profession, and it would seem as though he had dropped about as low as a human being could possibly fall and still retain the human semblance. The depravity of the man is almost unthinkable. So low down the incline had he gone that he was seriously meditating the murdering of his wife " for the fun of it," and still he was plunging on at a reeling momentum. He was in a saloon drinking at the time it happened. At the time what happened? Well, let us enquire, for something extraordinary took place—that is sure. We cannot stop to detail, but anyway, he came out of the evil resort, went direct to his wife whom he had marked for murder, and this is what he said, " Mollie, I am going to join the Salvation Army. I am going to see the little

angel-adjutant to-night" (this being the name by which the little leader was known in the district). Mollie, of course, was incredulous, but they went to the meeting. They both marched up to the penitents' bench. And now may we quote from the book? "I cannot describe my sensations. The past dropped clean away from me; it dropped like a ragged garment. An immense weight was lifted from my brain. I felt light as air. I felt clean. I felt happy. I felt my chest swell. I cannot say what it was. All I know is that there at that bench I was dismantled of all horror and clothed afresh in newness and joy."

And the other stories cited are quite as remarkable. They are all illustrations of deliverance from a most incredible captivity. There is nothing in Holy Writ more wonderful. The change in these poor derelicts seems simple, but behind it is the mighty power of the gospel of the Cross, and the truth for which that gospel stands—that the very lowest can be loved and lifted into the liberty of the Light of God. "That which is crooked cannot be made straight." But it can. As the black lump of coke may be crystallised into the sparkling diamond, and as the common soil beneath our feet may be refined and brought forth as the clean, shining aluminum, just so may the vilest repro-

bate be transformed by the grace of God into the image of Jesus Christ. This is the gospel, and if it is true, then, surely, no argument from modern scepticism need worry us. Of course, if the truth be identified with a book, then criticism directed against the book might shake our faith. But let us understand right here that Christianity never has been dependent on any literature. No literature could ever have established it if it had not been first a fact. Throw the Bible overboard and you still have the Christ to confront. Jesus Christ is a living, working dynamic in human society to-day. He can lift men and women out of their impotence by the simple power of loving.

IV. Still another stone of singular lustre awaits our regard—Vision. "Restoration of sight to the blind." Sin is blindness: salvation is seeing. Nineteen times in Scripture are we told that sin is blindness. The first result of the gospel is enlightenment. It opens men's minds. It gives men sight. It turns them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. "I am come that they which see not may see." No word describes the work of regeneration better than the word illumination—the dispelling of the dark. "The heathen in his blindness," so the old hymn puts it, "bows down to wood and stone." "In his blind-

ness!" When the prodigal came to himself his eyes were opened and he saw—he saw his true condition: he saw his shame: he saw his father: he saw the old home. "The entrance of Thy word giveth light." "He that followeth Me," says Jesus, "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

The greatest gift to a human life is the gift of vision. It makes the poet, the preacher, the painter. Malebranche used to pull down the blinds of his room in midday that he might the better see. It is the opening of life's inner shutters to the glory and wonder of the world. The prophets of the Old Testament were called seers, because they saw the drift and transfiguration of things in the light of the eternal. "Moses endured as seeing Him who is invisible." "Where there is no vision the people perish." Some people see nothing because their life is imprisoned. They are shut in. They are bounded by stone walls. Some see nothing because they have no conception of values. Most people see but little. It is part of the business of education to open the mind's eye, to lead out, to enlarge the intellectual outlook, to cultivate the powers of observation. The aim of education is not accumulation but awakening. What is an institution of learning but a place where young men have been taught

to perceive? What is a great capitalist but a seer in business? The world of nature greets us every morning with intimate flashes of freshness and loveliness, but how rarely we respond! The farmer sees a flower and calls it a weed, but the botanist looks at it and observes "a bit of heaven let down." The cow surveys the landscape and it suggests clover; the poet looks thereat and sees a poem. John Burroughs says that "some men are born with eyes in their heads and some with buttons." Mrs. Browning speaks of "every common bush aflame with God." But how many see the flame! How many, alas! see nothing but the berries on the bush! Old Homer was blind and poor, but his dead, sightless eyes flashed with the glory of an inner light. Raphael, on being asked how he came to paint such pictures, replied, "I dream dreams and then I paint my dreams." Two men travel through Palestine. To the one it is a most uninteresting trip—commonplace, indeed: to the other it is hallowed ground. Every spot is transfigured. How the past lives and breathes again! It is another "Field of the Cloth of Gold." There is nothing in the Trossachs that is not to be found in our own Adirondacks—lakes, peaks, moors, heaths, crags, coves, ravines, waterfalls, pines, laurels—only that no Scott

has yet appeared to relieve them for us and show us their fascinating romance. The mirror does not reflect anything that is not already in the room. What have you seen to-day? What heard? Did you hear the laugh of that little child in the street? Ah, you are a mother and thought of your own baby. What mother is there who does not see a loveliness in her child that no one else sees! Did you hear that soft, low note in the treetop this evening? Ah, then you love them: it was the linnet's good-night. Few heard it. So oft our ears are stone-deaf to the music about us. When Christ touches our ears what melodies we hear! When He touches our eyes what loveliness we see!

How dull and blind we are! How full of the grime of the street are our eyes. Richard Jeffries speaks of men "Mesmerised by matter and incapable of knowing soul values." This is the tragedy of materialism. Men do not see the priceless. We are not rich because we possess things. We think we are, but we are not. We are rich only in proportion as we see things. It is not what we have that makes us happy. It is what we are. And we are what we see. Life is bubbling over with good things if we could only see them. The spiritual world is all about us, in the rush and roar of

our avenues, in the bustle and clatter and traffic, in the lives of the people. It only needs an eye to discern it. "Except a man be born again he cannot see." So the new birth is simply a new vision. Oh, for grace-washed eyes! This is the glorious uniqueness of Jesus. This is why He never despairs of any sinner. He sees the slumbering possibility in every life. He looked at Simon and saw Cephas. He looked at Saul and saw Paul. In every man there are two men—there is the man as he is and the man as he may be. Jesus sees both. It is along the journey between what we are and what we may be that He leads us. He puts into our hearts a photograph of what we will be to-morrow. So we are saved by hope. It is as with the sculptor. The sculptor looks at the rough mass of marble. He sees a possible Venus in the block. It is the insight of faith. Faith sees something which the eye cannot see. The criticism has been made repeatedly that no such lad ever lived as George Macdonald has portrayed in Sir Gibbie. But the truth is that George Macdonald looked at a poor ragged street urchin and saw a man. Last summer the newspapers told us of a unique funeral in Chicago. The man had been a manufacturer. Around his grave were gathered a dozen men, all of whom tarried a mo-

ment after the relatives had gone. Who were these men? Every one of them was a released convict, to whom the deceased had given a job and a fresh start. They barely knew each other, but every one had come with a bunch of flowers to pay this tribute to the memory of a nobleman who had detected in them a faint remaining trace of the image of their common Father. So to him they were brothers. Oh, Master, open our eyes that we may recognise our brothers. Open them that we may regard our own soiled rags and Thine immaculate robe. Especially our hearts wilt Thou not be pleased to open, that we may accept Thy gospel, Thy healing, Thy liberty, Thy love?

# THE RICHES OF FORGIVENESS

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."—1 John 1:9.

IV

## THE RICHES OF FORGIVENESS

IF we confess our sins: not our crimes, mark. Most likely none of us is a criminal, but we all are sinners. "For all have sinned and fallen short." Crime is but a small corner of the great sin-swept continent in which, alas! we every one reside. Crime is a social state. It is governed by human law. But sin is spiritual territory. It belongs to God's jurisdiction. Crime can be weighed in the balances of human justice and its ordinariness or enormity adjudicated, but who hath scales sufficiently sensitive to record the gravity of a sin? No man hath. Sin is evil-doing in the heavenly Fairbanks. It is the transgression of the law. Whose law? His law. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." Sin is when a man is alone, and face to face with his Maker. We sin against our bodies, but only because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. We offend against man, but we sin against God.

Alas! what dupes we are! Great and tragic is our gift of self-illusion. Sin is the hollow skeleton of the heart, could we but see it. It is the spectre that has haunted the imagination of genius. Paul trembled when he was brought face to face with the vampire. So, likewise, did Shakespeare. It was to them the one daunting and distressing downfall. To him who seeth a soul in ruins Baalbec is tame. Jesus Christ never attempted to work into this shroud of sackcloth one thread of colour. His hatred of sin was well-nigh furious. He used the most withering words in language to describe it. Sin, to Him, was ugliness, ungodliness, rebellion, the final failure, eclipse, darkness, doom. " He went out and it was night." It was the ghastly wound of the Cosmos. It was the crowning horror in the dissecting-room of life. And to his greatest Apostle it was the same black, baleful bankruptcy. It was the mockery and the mystery and the tragedy of the soul. It was the blot on the world's beauty, the secret of her sore and moaning and groaning misfortune. " The whole creation travaileth in pain." Those there are to-day who make light of sin. They call it the other side of goodness, the shadow on the canvas, a lesser degree of holiness, the mistake of the beginner, a cinder in the eye, a splinter in the flesh, a

backward eddy in the stream, the sentimentalism of aspiration, a secretion of the soul. It is to them simply immaturity, imperfection, error, tunelessness, misfortune. Matthew Arnold said that sin is not a monster but an infirmity. These people are deaf to the discord. They are blind to the forbidding. They weave a verbal veil of coloured court-plaster over the suppurating sore. They ignore the riot raging within. But on the page of the Apostle sin is made to look just what it is. "Sin that it might appear sin." It is denuded. It loses the dazzle of its dress, the glitter of its jewelry, the sorcery of its siren song. It is graceless, grim, ghastly, godless. It is the one loathsome reality. It is leprose, pimply, scaly. It leads the soul to that inevitable finish where the grave is dug. "For the wages of sin is death."

Let us then, for a moment, pursue the path of Scripture to this black and bitter fountain of such all-inclusive sorrow. Let us consider her plan of conquest and her promise of ultimate and jubilant victory. It will be noted that there are two stages mentioned in the text, but if the context be taken into account it will at once be seen that there are three. The context throws an illuminating light upon the text. "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, but if we con-

fess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So here we have conviction of sin, confession of sin, and cleansing from sin. Let us approach these facts by way of the Cross.

I. And the first is conviction. This there must be. To deny it is to hoodwink ourselves and give the falsehood to our Father. For the language is unmistakable. "If we say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." Surely, strong and stern and bristling English! It ought to make us thoughtful, exceeding so. There are two classic passages in English literature that reflect the thought of two of our greatest poets. Shakespeare, in "Macbeth," introduces a knocking at the gate just following the murder of Duncan. It is the middle of the night, when naught but wolf and desperado is abroad. The air is sweet and wholesome without, and martlet and swallow are asleep under the jutting friezes of the castle. Duncan is in a sound slumber after the fatigues of the journey. The stillness all about is oppressive and intense. Suddenly, after the work of extermination, there is heard a sharp knocking at the gate. The sensation it produces is indescribably weird and unearthly. De Quincey, it will be remem-

bered, makes it the subject of one of his most famous essays. And his explanation is that it all depends upon reaction. In the murderer there was raging a great tempest of passion, in the castle there was the quietness of the deeps. Two worlds are represented in a clash. The world of everyday life is suddenly arrested. There is a syncope of the usual course of things. Another world steps in—a world of fiendishness and murder. And so it is that when the work of darkness is complete, then the world of darkness vanishes, and the poet makes us sensible of the return of the ordinary by a jerk, a blow, a shock, a reaction—a loud hammering at the gate. In the sphere of the spirit this is what we call conviction. Canon Farrar called it literature's classic illustration of Conviction of Sin. It is the pain of resuscitation in a drowning man. It acts as a glass of water dashed into the face of one in a swoon. The pulses of life are beginning to beat normally again.

The other passage is in Browning. Pippa is a little orphan girl working in a silk factory. It is New Year's Day, the only holiday in the year. At the first glimmer of dawn she awakens and rushes to the window. She watches the sun rise over the hills till it floods and overflows the valley. St. Mark's is visible in the

distance, and Padua lies soft and quiet and cosy in the cool dew of the morning.

"To-morrow I must be Pippa who winds silk
The whole year round, to earn just bread and milk."

"But to-day let me not squander a wavelet of thee, not a mite of my twelve hours' treasure." So down the grassy pathway, fragrant with lilac, she hurries, and up the hillside to the castle of Luca, her employer. Under the window of the summerhouse she sat and began to feast upon the beds of geraniums. How little she knows of the skeleton in Luca's closet! Who was Luca? Luca was an old man who lived for the piling up of treasure, until one empty morning he felt the need of love. Looking hastily about to see if he could not buy it, he found a pretty face in Ottima, who accepted him for his heaps of silver. But it was not long before each one learned the shivering tragedy of it. Ottima was fresh and beautiful: Luca was wrinkled. Ottima loved company: Luca longed for quiet. Ottima revelled in extravagance: Luca was the codger of economy. One day Sebald, her music teacher, gave Ottima a glance in parting, and straightway he carried away with him her heart. The sequel is a many-times-told tale. Out to the summerhouse the young lovers rushed this very morn-

ing, just as the deed was done. The young wife is steeling her paramour 'gainst remorse.

> "Now he's dead I hate him worse.
> I would go back and hold his two dead hands
> And say, I hate you worse,
> Luca, than——"

To which Sebald replies, "I kiss you now, dear Ottima. Will you forgive me and be my queen?" "Crown me your queen," says Ottima, "magnificent in sin." But just at this moment Pippa sitting outside the window, and altogether unconscious of any one's being within hearing, begins to sing:

> "The year's at the spring
> And day's at the morn;
> The lark's on the wing,
> God's in His heaven,
> All's right with the world."

The simple note was as the clap of doom. It was a bolt from the blue. The mask is lifted and we are once more in a real world. Now they hate each other. To him her grace was mysteriously gone. Her blank cheek hung listless and her very hair dropped as a dead web down her shoulders. What does Browning mean by this strange disturbance but conviction of sin? It is as in "Macbeth." He is jerking us back

to the reality and normality of things, for when sin is realised as guilt then there is conviction.

This is the mystery of the Cross. It is the supreme shock of the spiritual world. It starts anew the circulation of a suspended life. Conviction is the revivifying of conscience. When we stand before the Cross we are struck with the desperate villainy of our hearts. Sin hath done this. Yea, my sin hath done it. The mirror reveals to us the ravages of ill-health, the lines of time's unyielding fingers. And the Cross is a mirror. It brings home to the conscience a distinct indictment. It is a conflict of wills. In Melrose Abbey there is a window called the "Window of the Cross." And Calvary is a window through which we gaze and witness revealing lights. Through it we see wounds as old as humanity which need healing, and "stains as old as sin which need cleansing." The great transaction thus stirs our sense of guilt. Sin at the Cross is revealed as black as the nether hell. The spectacle of One who was truth, purity, beauty, love, humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death, provokes conviction and sorrow. Sin thereby becomes exceeding sinful. We know the strength of the tide when we begin to pull against it, and we realise the growing breach of departure from our early purity only when

we begin to feel the might of the current. The Cross enlightens, then convicts. We must come to the light for self-acquaintance. The Cross is the supreme revelation of sin's enormity.

II. The next step is confession. In the New Testament there are three kinds of confession. There is confession of sin, confession of faults, and confession of Christ. We confess our sins to God, our faults to one another, our Saviour to the world. We must confess our sins and we must confess our Saviour, for the man who is ashamed of his physician can hardly be said to be worthy the healing. Of course, it is of the first that the Apostle is thinking in these words, " If we confess our sins." Where there is a sincere conviction there will ever follow a true confession and a God-directed cry for pardon. The sad feature of the life of the age is that we are losing our sin-consciousness, and we are losing our sin-consciousness because we are losing our God-consciousness. Mariners tell us that the higher we soar into the blue above, the deeper we can penetrate into the abyss below. The depth is best discerned from the height. And we can only see ourselves truly when we sit in the light in heavenly places and have fellowship with Him. " If we say that we have fellowship

with Him and walk in the darkness, we lie." When God-consciousness goes, sin-consciousness will soon proceed to follow. For sin we saw was rebellion: it is running away from home; it is wilfulness; it is a blow at the parental authority. Confession is coming back with your guilty burden to the Father. "Father, I have sinned and am not worthy to be called thy son: make me a hired servant." This is true confession. It asks for the privilege of suffering. So it brings us back to Calvary and to the fellowship of the crucified.

> "Just as I am, without one plea
> But that Thy blood was shed for me,
> And that Thou bidst me come to Thee;
> Oh, Lamb of God, I come."

Sin in itself does not, as a rule, trouble us much to-day. It only worries us when wedded to its wages. Sin, hand in hand with suffering, becomes unwelcome, unlovely. What the average criminal fears most to-day is the exposure of his crime. The penalty he dreads is discovery. But, according to Scripture, the real ravage of wrong-doing is not without, but within. "He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul." It is not the outward consequence that is serious, but the inward scar. The consciousness of being self-condemned is

the real tragedy. The guilt is in the deed, not in the fact that it becomes unveiled. Nietzsche says, "I can forgive you for all that you have done to me, but how can I forgive you for all that you have done to yourself?" And this is the significance of confession. We confess our unworthiness. "I am not worthy to be called Thy son." The consciousness of failure and of having missed the mark is soul-subduing and humbling, and impels to the Father. Confession is simply accepting God's valuation of our misdeeds. When a man confesses to the state he puts himself in the hands of the state, and when we acknowledge our transgressions to God we are subscribing and surrendering to His judgment. All sin, be it noted, is against God and must be confessed. But if man is wronged that, too, when possible must be confessed. Arthur Dimmesdale carried his guilty secret with him for seven long years. But the strain became unbearable, and not until he confessed his shame in the public square of the old town did he find sweet tranquil relief. In one of Balzac's stories a mother fathered her babe on an innocent man, which in the end blighted his life. Confessing her guilty secret to the bishop, the good man said, "You must go and take the brand off as publicly as you put it on." This is the verdict of the New Testa-

ment. There can be no forgiveness till there is unreserved and whole-hearted confession. The voice of the Apostle is clear and explicit, "If we confess, He is faithful and righteous to forgive."

III. The third step is cleansing. If we confess, He is faithful and righteous to forgive and to cleanse. Over against our unrighteousness is His righteousness. The world sometimes asks, "Why does not God forgive all men and put an end to it?" Why all this complexity of sacrifice in the pages of the old economy? Why the passion and death of Jesus? But the man who talks thuswise does not understand the cry of the Father seeking His child. Of what avail is forgiveness, if the one forgiven does not affect it? To provoke the desire is the difficulty. Forgiveness is not possible until there has first been repentance and desire. The hardest task the physician sometimes confronts is the creating of an appetite in an impotent organism. If my little boy tips a bottle of ink on my writing-desk some day and says, "Oh, papa, please excuse me; I did not mean to do it," I can at once say, "Oh, never mind that, dear; I'll wipe it up." Forgiveness is thus a simple matter. But if he comes home from school some afternoon and tells me a deliberate untruth and looks me in the

eye and sticks to it, that is not a simple matter. That becomes a very serious matter. It sits heavily: it hurts. And my hurt is because of his danger. No water bubbling from the bowels of any brook can ever wash that uncleanness away. Even in its human relationship it calls for an atonement. My love must suffer, and the deeper the love the greater the suffering. A father's forgiveness is criminal if it deadens the enormity of the crime.

This is the very core of redemption. When God forgives, He heals. The problem with our Heavenly Father is not simply to forgive, He longs to do that; but the problem is to forgive and at the same time to make whole. His forgiveness is a self-communication. "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us." And to change the sinner so that he aspires to the purity, this is the problem. To accept pardon is to pledge ourselves to the pursuit of holiness. Men theorise about the Atonement, but here is the fact of the Atonement. "I gave My life for thee." I give my life to thee. When the prodigal in the parable returned he was kissed; that was the reconciliation, that was forgiveness. Then he was clothed; that was the imputed robe. Then he

was fed; that was the strength to overcome. But the first essential is to receive the kiss. After this will follow the robe and the virtue. God is not reconciled to us. Away with the infamy! We are reconciled to Him. Forgiveness is simply restoration of the human spirit to fellowship with the Father. The old connection between the human spirit and God had been broken by sin. It is now reëstablished. "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." Forgiveness charges the paralysed will with the conquering forces of a new life. The final test of any religion is its power to make men whole. Salvation, in the sense of safety, comes only through salvation in the sense of soundness. Happiness is rooted in shallow soil, but holiness goes down to deep foundations, even to bed-rock.

To-day we are being told that the doctrine of forgiveness is exploded, that it cannot any longer survive the searchings of science, that sin exacts its last farthing. It was Socrates who said, "Plato, perhaps God can forgive deliberate sin, but I don't see how He can." Theosophy, for one, claims to have slain the doctrine. This, too, is the message of George Eliot. She makes poor Hetty Sorrel suffer. There was no hope for her. She must take her punishment and bear it. "You have sinned,"

this fatalism cries, "well, be it so: be not a coward begging for mercy: go and pay your debt like a man." But, alas! how are some debts going to be paid like a man? How is the debt of murder to be paid? How is the debt of adultery to be paid? When some men hear the invitation, "Come to the Cross," they think of that other cross they have been instrumental in making some poor innocent child carry, and the thought is a scourge. Joseph Conrad, in one of his books, tells the story of an abandonment at sea. The master of the vessel and all the officers forsook the ship *Patna,* in mid-ocean, with her cargo of helpless pilgrims. The captain is condemned by the court. His certificate is cancelled. But that is a small matter. The real punishment is inflicted within. Go where he would, that abandoned schooner swam into vision. It tortured him by day, and filled his dreams by night. Sometimes in the morning a cold sweat of anguish would be on his brow. How, pray, is that debt going to be paid?

Only in one way. Some higher power must pay it. The old hymn is not such doggerel as we thought; it is the poetry of heaven; "Jesus paid it all." The point is not whether we live in a universe of inexorable law, but whether there is anything in the universe but the law.

Forgiveness is a personal act and is not amenable to law. Of course, forgiveness never gives back what we have forfeited. If a man is a forgiven prodigal, it is as a forgiven prodigal that he will be restored. He may live ever after a triumphant life, but it will be the life of one who, in early days, had been a rake. Some of the losses and limitations he must carry with him to the Bar above. "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness." But let it not be overlooked that there are two kinds of perfection. There is a negative and a positive maturity. There is a perfection that is faultless and a perfection that is blameless. Is the bud perfect? Yes, as a bud, but the perfect flower is a higher attainment. The content of the chief of sinners will be circumscribed, but the cleansing will be complete. It is the eternal mystery of the Cross. It is the crowning glory of the Crucified. He exchanges our blackness for His own unsullied whiteness. "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

# THE RICHES OF EXPERIENCE

"That they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."—John 17:3.

V

## THE RICHES OF EXPERIENCE

IT has often been pointed out how the Bible never once attempts to prove the existence of a Supreme Being. It postulates it at the threshold. "In the beginning God." The word Atheist is a very simple word. It means a man who does not believe in God. But there are few such men to-day. One hundred years ago there were numbers of educated men who did not hesitate to avow themselves out-and-out unbelievers. But to-day the list is astonishingly small. In fact, since Professor Clifford's death we do not know a half-dozen great scholars who would be willing to say that the "Great Companion is dead." Israel Zangwill has a little poem:

"The nymphs are gone, the fairies flown,
The olden presence is unknown,
The ancient gods forever fled,
The stars are silent overhead.
The music of the spheres is still;
The night is dark, the wind is chill;
The later gods have followed Pan;
And man is left alone with man."

We do not quite understand what Mr. Zangwill means in these lines, for we could quote several passages from the works of this famous Israelite to show that he is not by any means an atheist. Then there is Maeterlinck. In his charming book, "The Life of the Bee," he spells God with a little g, but as before we are not just sure what he means either, for Mr. Maeterlinck, like Mr. Zangwill, judging from the great bulk of his work, can hardly be classed an atheist. Rub the idea of God out of his writings and they crumble into chaotic incoherence. "Mary Magdalen" is certainly the work of a reverent poet and a man of deep spirituality.

There are indeed few atheists to-day. Times have changed. And Professor Huxley, more than any other man, according to my old teacher, Dr. Patton, is responsible for the change. He once made the remark, it will be remembered, that atheism was "philosophically absurd." He did not mean by this phrasing to avow himself a theist. He simply drew our attention to the impossibility of establishing a negative. For to demonstrate such an absolute and sweeping denial would argue omniscience. It would presuppose an infinite knowledge and acquaintance. When we reflect how little we have roamed throughout this

mighty Cosmos and how poor our powers of observation, it is surely not a wise policy to dogmatise on what is, or what is not, in the vast realm of the unknown. Who can prove that this earth is the only world in space that is inhabited? Why, even to-day astronomers are divided as to our neighbour planet Mars, some like Professors Lowell and Schiaparelli and Flammarion claiming that it is the abode of highly intelligent beings, others, like the great English astronomer Campbell and Fizeau and the noted Swedish chemist Arrhenius, saying that it is a total waste of ice. The man who hopes to establish his creed of deistic denial must ransack every corner of this infinite domain. He must voyage through strange, unexplored seas of space. And this is what Mr. Huxley meant by calling it "philosophically absurd."

"I believe in God." This first article of our creed we hold in common with the race, with Jews and Mohammedans, with Plato and Aristotle and Seneca and Epictetus, with the greatest scholars of every era and of every clime. The question at issue to-day is not God but the knowledge of God. Goldwin Smith giving his last utterance to the world, not long ago, said, that he did not wish to be understood as opposing religion or rejecting the infinite wisdom,

but voiced the familiar agnostic attitude that we could not know it. It was in his judgment unknowable. But Jesus Christ spoke otherwise. He called this wisdom by the endearing name of Father, and He said it could be known. He never said a word about Mars and its canals and fissures and inland seas. He never told us whether it was instinct or extinct. He never uttered a syllable about primordial protoplasm. He never spent His time speculating about the Universe and its history, but on the night before His Crucifixion, around the holy table in that solemn upper room, the saddest night that ever darkened this sinful earth, He prayed that His disciples might know God. "That they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

We are living in an age of doubt. In the olden time men asked for signs. What they demand to-day is proofs. "Prove these things to us," they say. In Moses' day what the people wanted was a visible manifestation of God, but to-day we are being pressed for a logical demonstration of Him. But such people forget that the greatest things are not always demonstrable. "Men do not believe in immortality," says Martineau, "because they have ever proven it, but they are always trying to prove it, because they cannot help believing it." The

religious world was never in such a state of upheaval as it is to-day. And not only the religious world! The economic world as well, the commercial world, the scientific world, the world of society and militarism and government. The old order changeth. It is in a state of flux. Often we hear it said that we are living in a transition age, a period of reconstruction, " the sick, foggy dawn of a new era." The marriage law is questioned, the Sabbath day is gone or fast going, the holiness of human life has lost its hold, the New Testament no longer carries its accent of authority. Speculation is in the air. Men are throwing away their Bibles as children cast out broken toys. The world is losing its God-consciousness. Dogma is an anachronism. The capital mark of culture to-day is to speak in apology and to live on Doubtful Street. And the sad feature is the baneful sequel to it all. The whole tone of society is admittedly more irreverent. Sacred things are losing their halo. Divorce courts are working sorrowful havoc. Suicide is becoming an alarming note. Business standards have suffered decline. There has, in fact, come a general all-round moral slump. When we are told that thousands have lost their religious faith, we begin to wonder whether or no there is any causal connection between this and the

fact that the courts of our country granted 30,000 divorces last year. There is at least a suspicious concomitance.

The question at issue, then, is this, can we know God? If so, how may we know Him? Let us go out for a little and reconnoitre. Let us survey the field, and let us carry with us an eye vigilant, and a heart expectant and wistful and devout. For, if we leave our hearts behind, we are neglecting our finest and most effective equipment. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

I. There is, first of all, the great Book of Nature, bound in purple and gold. Let us consult this standard authority. Let us carefully note her declarative testimony. Crusoe thought himself alone until one morning, walking along the sandy shore, he espied the prints of a human foot. And that is a transfiguring moment in life when tracks in nature attract the eye that are not the impressions of anything human. Geikie makes a life-study of the earth's geological structure and finds that its varied features owe their origin largely to denudation and erosion. Rivers have excavated valleys, and the whole land has been sculptured by the action of epigene agents. Of course, volcanic action and crustal disturbance have done their work, too. And so he

reads the marvellous record of land-development as one might read a manuscript of Guyot's or Dana's. And he goes on to say that he is reading "the handwriting of some Infinite Penman." Mr. Burbank, for twenty-five years, has been studying the pages of the vegetable kingdom. Beginning many years ago with the dahlia, he familiarised himself with the incidents in its life history, its methods of growth, its peculiarities of environment, the shape of its leaves, and stems, and petals. He found it single and with an offensive odour, but by observing, comparing, selecting, crossing, he at last succeeded in overcoming habits that had existed for thousands of generations, in fixing new traits, till now he has evolved the double flower and with the sweet fragrance of the magnolia. And from the dahlia he has gone on till now he takes all plant-life for his enchanting and bewitching fairyland. He gives us an apple sweet on one side and sour on the other. Mr. Burbank tells us, too, that he is interpreting the thought of some "Wonderful Botanist." "I am opposed," he says, "to the theory of the materialists. I am a sincere believer in a higher power than man. All my investigations have led me away from the idea of a dead universe tossed about by various forces, to that of a universe which is life, soul,

thought, or whatever name we may choose to call it." John Burroughs goes out for his daily walk in the dewy cool of the April twilight and his nose detects the most fugitive odours, his ear the most furtive whispers. He hears the soft call of the owl in the cedars and the whistling wings of the woodcock as it rushes by in the dusk. He drinks in the fragrance of the ferns. He listens to the music of the winds in the groves. He notes the subtle signs of the weather. He takes cognisance of the sights and sounds and smells that ever and anon salute his sense. He reads the fine print and the footnotes. He lingers long on the obscure text and the marginal references. He declares he is reading aloud the thoughts which some mind has expressed, and what a fascinating story he makes it—a story of order and harmony and beauty and colour. John Muir and Asa Gray sat around a campfire in the heart of the Sierras, and they talked about the great trees arching overhead. They agreed that in simple majesty the Sequoia Wellingtonia leads the world. In the late winter the flowers of these mighty giants appear with their golden dust. Their cones are very small, the seed being smaller than an elm seed. And yet they climb three hundred feet into the clouds, the bark alone being two feet thick. They look

not up nor down; they look out. They are bare of limb for two-thirds of their great fluted trunks. They go on to discuss the story of the life of these mammoth creatures. Muir examined one stump that showed four thousand annual rings, when suddenly the Harvard scientist turned and said to the Sierra mountaineer, "John, some master Designer has been lingering here." "I am not an atheist," said Mr. Edison recently, "and never said I was. Those calling me one have not read my interview. No wise man can be both scientist and atheist." Rudolph Eucken is conceded by many scholars to-day to be the world's greatest living constructive thinker, and it is Eucken who, the other day, affirmed that "Materialism is bankrupt."

And so it goes. Bird, bush, flower, river, glacier, sun, star, ocean, mountain, man—all these works of science are revelations penned by the divine finger. It is a great library of facts. The facts may be misread, but if so the fault is ours. Full oft theology has manipulated the facts to fit into the theories, but so much the worse for theology. Playing with facts and playing with fire are dangerous sports. The facts are constant. They always tell the same tale. We cannot be false to facts and true to Jesus. Facts are the utterances of

some creative Wisdom. That Wisdom cannot say one thing in palæontology and another thing in prophecy. The God of science and the God of Scripture must agree. The universe is God's expression. It is His music, His painting, His statuary, His utterance. What a dreadful world this is when, as Comte says, "God is bowed out"! There are marks of intelligence and order and beauty, but they are accidental and fortuitous and mostly imaginary. It becomes an unreal world. This is what the Psalmist meant when he said, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." And then, coming down from the celestial spaces to the law, he adds, "The law of Jehovah is perfect, His testimony is wise, His precepts are right, His commandment is pure." Code and Cosmos are alike. His works and His words are at one. They tell the same story.

II. Then there is the Book of Revelation. We know something of man from the works of his hands, but we know more about him from the creations of his mind and heart. Paul was a tent-maker, but if we knew nothing of Paul save the tents he made, we should not possess anything very illuminating. Hugh Mil-

ler was a stone-mason, but if the only thing we knew about Hugh Miller was the blocks he smoothed and polished, how little in touch we would be with the man. Carey was a cobbler, but if all we knew about William Carey was the shoes he mended, our knowledge would certainly not be very exhaustive. So likewise of Bunyan the tinker, and Epictetus the slave, and John Williams the ironmonger missionary, and many another of the world's choicest spirits.

Could any one infer from the "Sistine Madonna" that Raphael had a mistress to whom he indited three sonnets, and whose portrait is in the Pitti Palace in Florence? Suppose Leonardo were to be judged by his "Last Supper," would we be likely to derive that he was indifferent to religion, and esteemed it "better to be a philosopher or scientist than a Christian"? Could one gather from Guido Reni's "Ecce Homo" that the artist was a dissipated man, and an inveterate gambler who died in debt? If we knew nothing of Benvenuto Cellini but his colossal bronze relief "The Nymph of Fontainebleau," now in the Louvre, what possible clue would we have to his incongruous character? Man puts his grey matter into his work, but he cannot always put his moral stuff into it. John Burroughs knows

an "Infinite Something," but he confesses candidly to an ignorance as to its nature or personality. With William Watson, he says,

> "Above the clouds, beneath the sod,
> The unknown God, the unknown God."

But can we be said to know any one until we know his mind and heart? Is not "the mind the standard of the man"? The heavens declare the glory of God, but they tell us nothing of His goodness. We know more of Rossetti from the sonnets he wrote to his wife and buried with her, than from the portrait he painted of her. No astronomer ever argued the divine Fatherhood from studying the stars. "God is love," says the inspired Apostle, but only inspiration ever rises to that exalted and constraining outlook.

This was the mission of Jesus, to reveal the Father. "This is eternal life, to know Thee the only true God." We cannot know everything about God, but how wide and reckless the leap between saying we can know everything and we cannot know anything. The human mind could not well worship a being it had exhausted. Man may admire what he comprehends, but he does not worship it. Leslie Stephen, on one occasion, contributed an article to *Blackwood's Magazine,* and the gist of the article was a

criticism as to how Jehovah could speak to Adam and Noah and Abraham and Jacob, and Moses on the mountain top, and Elijah under the juniper tree. But why should that be such an impassable difficulty to a philosopher? If Jehovah created the great itinerant prophet of Carmel, it would seem passing strange were He helpless to hold converse with him. Lewis Carroll wrote a little book entitled "Alice in Wonderland." He was at the time a learned professor in the University of Oxford, a higher mathematician who published treatises on conic sections and the calculus, and the world could not for long understand how such mentality was able to incarnate itself in a child. I have recently been reading David Starr Jordan's "Child Stories" to my own children, and I, too, wondered at the adaptability of the great stern college president—and but few of the stories are about fish, either. And is God less able? Can He not accommodate Himself as easily to the content of His little ones? Is the Creator more helpless than the creature? Has He locked Himself out of His own dwelling? Dean Stanley's remark to Professor Tyndall is illuminating. They had been close friends all through life. Meeting in Switzerland one summer, the Dean said to the scientist one day, as they gazed across the awful gorges,

"Tyndall, don't you believe some power made all that?" "Yes, I do," replied the physicist. "And don't you believe that a power that could make all that would be able to reveal Himself to me?" "Surely," the physicist again made answer. There was silence for a moment. "And don't you think it would be somewhat strange if He could reveal Himself and didn't?" There is no reply recorded. But the question is a searching one. And the more one thinks about it the more insistent and imperative does it become. Mr. Goldwin Smith told us in the symposium to which we have already referred, that the most wonderful thing to him in all this obscurity about us was the fact of conscience. But if there is no mind, no heart, no will, no love, no truth, no justice, no mercy at the fountain-head of things, whence came this marvellous moral endowment? How comes it that it has leaped uncaused into such effectual action? "A power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." But righteousness argues personality. And evolution spells involution. The argument from man's personality to God's personality is well-nigh compelling. To state the agnostic attitude would seem to expose its untenableness.

"We know," says the Apostle John, "that the Son of God is come." "We know that He

was manifested to take away our sins." "We know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us." There are but five chapters in the first Epistle of John, and it uses the word know eight-and-thirty times. "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren." "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not." "And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ."

III. But, once more, we have the Book of Experience. Last summer, sailing over Lake Ontario, it was our privilege to listen to a rather heated argument between two passengers on the subject of religion. It was not necessary to act the part of an unworthy eavesdropper to catch the burden of their talk, for they were debating eagerly and loudly. The first man belonged to that growing class of drifting church members one might almost call a religious agnostic: the other spoke with the accent of conviction. It was in the slow gathering of the timid twilight. We were rounding Hanlan's Island, coming into Toronto. The lights were burning high on the headlands, and off in the distance the city glim-

mered through the evening curtain. "But I have a light within me," the older gentleman insisted, "there's no 'think' about it. I know. I trust it with as much confidence as our pilot trusts that beacon yonder. I was a drunkard and a profligate once; now I'm a member of the church. Once I was a moral wreck; now I'm on deck. Once I was blind; now I see."

Is not this the crying need of the hour? Have we not a right to know and to know that we know? Faith is not credulity. Our hope is not a brilliant and beautiful and shadowy 'perhaps.' It is an assurance, a conviction. We are in the grip of a great unyielding certainty. It was Lord Macaulay, was it not, who once remarked that he never cared to attend the religious service of a preacher who believed less than himself. "We have 'don't knows' enough," said the old Scotch farmer to his new minister; "tell us, mon, what you do know." If we are ever going to lift a lost world on to the solid rock of truth, we must be standing there firmly-footed ourselves. Missions can only march to the music of "We know." No church that moves with faltering step is going to send her sons out to loneliness and peril. Paul says, "I know whom I have believed." How confident the tone! How calming! How quieting! In the storm, how

nerving to hear the captain of the ship speak decisively. How it stablishes our trembling timidity! How the vacillating surmise drives to panic and fear! How we welcome the strong, positive, assuring, commanding, comforting note! And this note is found only in experience. No one but a mother can ever understand the sweet mystery of mother love. One might read many a treatise on the affections and be nothing the wiser. The poorest washerwoman down the alley, with her little brood about her, is a greater authority on that point than the most brilliant George Eliot who never bore a child. The only way to feel the love a mother feels is to become a mother. It is the old way of experience. And the only way to know God is to experience Him. The Christian's faith is not a doctrine but a man. His Christianity is not a creed but a person. How remarkable that the great Apostle to the Gentiles only quotes Jesus twice! "I am determined," he says, "to know Christ"; not His parables, not His sermons, but the Man Himself "who loved me and gave Himself for me." When we read the letters of Junius, it matters but little to us to-day that they were written anonymously; their merit remains the same. But we cannot possibly do with an anonymous Jesus; that matters everything. His message is

Himself. His gift is His own person. Renan said, " Jesus taught nothing but Himself, nothing of art or literature or philosophy," and for once Renan is orthodox. " As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

It was my privilege recently to visit one whose feet were nearing the waters. " Sit down," she whispered. " You're the minister; so glad to see you. I've been lonely. My people live in Canada "—and after a pause—" don't suppose I shall ever see them again." " Well, my dear woman," I returned, " I have a book here with some very cheery passages for lonely people," and I quoted a number: " Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." " Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." " I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." " Do you believe that? " she said, looking up with a sort of half-quizzical, half-longing despair. " Believe it? Why, I know it." " Well," and she sighed, " I suppose it is my own fault." Then, after a little, " I was a member of the church once, but the attachment was never very close, and I drifted. I began to read some books in college which I

suppose I should not have read, but I did. The sermons I used to hear never satisfied me. There was always such a haze and remoteness about it all. My mind is mathematical: it craves certainty. I wanted to know. Don't you feel that way sometimes? Do you think we can know, really and truly know?"

"Do you think it fair," I interposed, "to ask for mathematics in the sphere of morals? Is there not a difference between proof and assurance? I cannot prove the composition of the sun. There are many elements in it, such as iron and potassium and hydrogen, so the scientists tell us. But there is one thing I do know. For as I sit here in this window I can feel the sun's warmth stealing into my bones. I am sure of that." We know so little about our Heavenly Father. He is the Infinite One and we are but children. But if we feel His love warming our hearts, is it not a fact as real as anything the spectroscope tells us?

So let us learn the sweet and simple secret. The only way to know is to experience; and the only way to experience is to trust. "I know whom I have believed." Mark the tenses, please; have believed: know. The first step to take is to believe, to press out on the promises. "He that believeth on the Son hath the witness in himself." Proof is personal because trust

is personal. It is a condition of heart emanating from a relationship to a person. No mere ideal can satisfy the deeps of our nature. This comes only from personal fellowship. As Amiel says, "Only inspiration can impart life," and there can be no inspiration without an inspirer. Promises imply a promiser. When once a man realises that Christianity is Christ, then, and only then, does vagueness vanish. The truths of arithmetic must be proven by figures, but the truths about life must be verified by living. So let us put the emphasis on the personal equation. This way lies assurance.

"I do not know the ocean's song,
  Or what the brooklets say;
At eve I sit and listen long,
  I cannot learn their lay.
But as I linger by the sea,
And that sweet song comes unto me,
It seems, my Lord, it sings of Thee.

"I do not know why poppies grow
  Amid the wheat and rye;
The lilies bloom as white as snow,
  I cannot answer why.
But all the flowers of the spring,
The bees that hum, the birds that sing,
A thought of Thee they seem to bring.

"I cannot tell why silvery Mars
  Moves through the heav'ns at night;

I cannot reason why the stars
  Adorn the vault with light.
But what sublimity I see,
Upon the mount, the hill, the lea,
It brings, my Lord, a thought of Thee.

"I do not know what glorious light
  Makes this heart thus to glow,
And why my spirit longs and cries,
  I vow I do not know.
But when my Saviour touched my sight
My slumbering soul awoke in light,
And since that day I've known no night."

—McGirt.

# THE RICHES OF POWER

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

## VI

# THE RICHES OF POWER

GEORGE MATHESON, in one of those prose poems of his, shows us how the precise idea of the Apostle in this verse is not always remarked. He is writing to the Romans. Rome, be it remembered, was the world's metropolis, the centre of its power, the mistress of the seas, and with a war record unrivalled. Her whole career had been a "March of the Conquerors." No one could stand in the centre of her greatness without a swelling of pride. She was the symbol of strength and force. Muscle was manhood, might was right. And Rome's opposition to the new faith was because of its seeming weakness. It had no belligerent aspect. Nothing was so unpardonable in a Roman's eyes as to have been vanquished. They had been a victorious people, and the story of the Nazarene was linked with a cross. That alone was enough to finally condemn it. That carried with it an inglorious stigma. It was to them, indeed, a vulgar tale—the tale of a simple

peasant put to death as a criminal. And the very first idea of the Apostle is to correct this false impression. The gospel, he begins, is not a defeat: it is a dynamic. It has a Roman feature about it. It has some of the elements you admire. It is an energy, a power, an impulse. "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

And, surely, that word salvation must have sounded not a little astonishing to a militant empire. Had not her whole advance been one of trampling destruction? Had she not met and overcome the Greek, the Carthaginian, the Syrian, the Gaul, the Samnite, the Macedonian? Aye, verily, she had. To crush every rival had been her proud aim and boast. And what the Apostle labours to denote in this letter is that there is a victory that fulfils, which is infinitely greater than the victory that destroys. Cæsar typifies the one. Christ represents the other.

Paul never apologised for his faith. There was nothing in it that ever made him blush. I am ready to come to Rome, he begins, and in the presence of royalty defend it. And that was a singularly courageous challenge. For, be it borne in mind, that, at the time these words were written, the new religion was without standing or influence. No great

philosopher had spoken well of it. No art or literature had enshrined it. Only one historian had even referred to it—Tacitus—and he called it a "mischievous superstition." It had no commanding synagogue to lend it æsthetic tone, no organised priesthood, no wealth to lure to it the ambitious followers of fashion. Its disciples were altogether poor and unlettered. It was not an easy thing to offer oneself to be the champion of such an inglorious and fruitless propaganda. Surely, nothing save the vision of inspiration could anticipate the time when the despised name of Jesus would be mightier than Cæsar's. But this was the triumphant climax of the Apostle's faith. And the story of how, a few years later, he did come to the Imperial City is a familiar one. We will not pause to follow him in this memorable voyage. He came in chains; he entered the city a prisoner in charge of a centurion. He plead his cause. He delivered his message. History has already passed its verdict. Paul's opinion of Rome is on record. Rome's opinion of Paul is not of overwhelming or vital concern.

Well, about nineteen hundred years have passed since these words were spoken. To-day we occupy the vantage of the backward look. For two millenniums the Evangel has been at

work out in the thick of things. It has been on trial in every stratum of life and in every zone. High and low, rich and poor, wise and unwise, black and white, Greek and barbarian are all in a position to speak as to its weaknesses or its merits. All have the right to their say. All have a voice in the verdict. Let us, for a moment, this morning consider the challenge of the Church under the light of these different testimonies, as well as of Biblical scholarship and a reconstructed theology. A bath in the fundamentals will be, at least, exhilarating. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

I. And to begin with, we are not ashamed of its *Simplicity*. Because we consider, after all, that the glory of the Gospel is its simplicity. It is verily refreshing to study the New Testament, packed full of mysteries as it undoubtedly is, and yet how beautifully simple is its essential message, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." This is the one ultimate of its revelation. And nothing could be more elementary. The wayfaring man, though fool, need not lose the way. It is a sign-post for the child. No child misses the path. The child is not a theologian, but it knows the sweet secret of trust. And except

we become as little children we cannot pass into the enchanted kingdom. The way to heaven is not via Weimar, but via Bethelehem. When Paul speaks of the simplicity that is in Christ he means, of course, a simplicity toward Christ. It is a simplicity on our part, a simplicity of attitude. "Receive with meekness the engrafted word." And this is faith. Faith is a purely personal relationship.

"Why should we wrestle with fears
And doubts which the Spirit must grieve,
And why should we linger in sorrow and tears
When there's nothing to do but believe?"

One of the strongest evidences to the truth of our Evangel would seem to be that the terms it enunciates and conditions are so reachable to all. No doubt it would have sounded very pleasing to the apostles of culture had Paul made the keynote of this letter from which our text is taken, "We are saved by learning." And it is not at all unlikely that, if the Book of Romans had been spun out of the bowels of human thinking, that would have been its proud, pretentious argument. America's arch blasphemer was accustomed to take for the text of one of his most popular lectures these words, "There is no darkness but ignorance, there is no light but intelligence." This is the gospel

of doubt. This is materialism at its best. The rationalist has nothing finer or nobler to offer. But how despairing! How unattainable save to the few! We hear of the exclusiveness of Calvinism. Why, the exclusiveness of Calvinism is a little thing compared to the exclusiveness of culture. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto culture and few there be that find it. Salvation by faith is the only gospel that could have been given to the race even on the ground of an impartial equality. For religion is the property of the heart not the intellect, and we are all alike there.

Perhaps there is nothing which the Church needs so to learn to-day as how to get back to the simplicity that is in Jesus. Sin is never simple; it is subtle. Quite recently it was our privilege to listen to a sermon on the "Psychological Aspect of the Divine Fatherhood." The Master would not have spoken thuswise, "When ye pray, say our Father." Why bother our brains about the psychological aspect of it, whatever that may be. Too apt are we to clutter up the old path with traditions. It has been patched and mended, some one says, with cart-loads of texts and doubtful débris like the Slough of Despond. The common people heard the Great Teacher gladly. He never ad-

dressed them in academic strain. He never soared into the cloudy heights of philosophy. Never does he say, "Learn of me, for I am learned." His gospel is a sweet and simple secret, if we do not encrust it in definitions, or dogmatise it, or make it hard and cold and arid. It is a gracious gift, and the most unlettered, the most abandoned, can take the gift and feel as welcome to it as the wisest sage or loftiest moralist. Few and simple are the essentials which bring peace and pardon to the seeking heart. I never feel the simplicity of my faith so deeply as when I sit at the Communion Table. Its sacramental emblems are a piece of bread and a cup of wine. Could anything be *homelier?* Plato demanded much of his pupils. He wrote over the door of his academy, "None but those skilled in geometry can enter here." But contrariwise Jesus said, "Only little children admitted." Every unsaved man here can have his life illuminated and transformed by the light of God just now, and just where he is, by simply opening the door of his heart, childlike, to the Saviour. No need to make a crusade to some distant shrine. We are already in the zone of health. "The word is nigh thee even in thy mouth that is the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus

and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead thou shalt be saved."

II. We are not ashamed of its *Mysteries.* It has mysteries, and they are unfathomable and past unfolding. As Robert Hall used to say: "There are shallows in the Scriptures where the lambs may wade, and there are deeps where the elephant may swim." How came sin into the world? We know not. How did the Saviour come? We are as deeply and as desperately in the dark. Great is the mystery of iniquity. Greater still the mystery of godliness. The Infinite became an Infant. To-day perhaps more than in any age of the world's history, there is a tendency to place undue regard on the difficulties presented by the Bible mysteries, and so, in consequence, to smile these mysteries out of court. Because the Virgin Birth does not align itself with the order of nature, it is mythologised. Not infrequently the miraculous lends itself to jest and amusement. Because the demonology of the New Testament is an essential part of its account of the spirit world, and gives us a dualistic conception of the Universe, it is ridiculed.

It is becoming popular nowadays to take refuge in figure, inasmuch as the atmosphere of the age is supposed to be somewhat suffocating to miracle. Bring the message up-to-

date we hear on every side, meaning thereby to make it sensible and tangible; forgetting all the while that the very glory of the message is that it is dateless and spiritual and insensible and intangible. But every mother knows full well how her child can ask questions every hour of the day which the wisest doctor of learning is powerless to answer, and, as Henry Drummond was wont to remark, "I find so many more puzzling things outside the Bible than in it." How many molecular magnets are there in a cubic inch of steel? Let Elisha Gray tell us. I turn to volume 3, chapter IV, page 25 of his "Nature Miracles." "Chalk down the figure 1 on the blackboard," he says. "Put twenty-three ciphers after it." Can you take that in? Is there any arithmetic in the apocalypse more bewildering? There is a star in astronomical nomenclature known as 1830 Groombridge. Astronomers tell us it is at least 2,000,000 times as far away as the sun. That is, in rough numbers, something more than 186,000,000,000,000 miles. And it is moving at the rate of about twenty million miles every twenty-four hours. Why, if Genesis had said that, we would have called it one of the "Mistakes of Moses," but Professor Simon Newcomb says it in his little book, "Problems of Astronomy," and it is silencing. I asked Pro-

fessor Hale, of the Mount Wilson Observatory, last winter, the greatest living authority, by the way, on solar research, what the temperature of the sun was. He said the surface temperature is about 60,000° F., "but the heat within," he went on, "is so intense that we cannot even guess at it." And how does it sustain such an awful caloric? I innocently advanced. But he smiled.

No, the mysteries are not all in the Bible—not by any means. The little ones are there; the big ones are not there. It is almost amusing to note the ease with which a certain class of critics can ride over the rough places, the boulders and cañons and chasms of science—with a hop-skip-and-jump, as it were—and then trip and stumble on the rock of Revelation. Mysteries do not bother us in the science hall. It is only in the Church that they become so mountainous and disquieting. There are brain-baffling mysteries in geology, botany, biology, astronomy, physiology, and, indeed, in every department of natural science that never will be, never can be, cleared away, and a theology without something of the same stuff would be a somewhat lonely science. Never ought we, I repeat, to allow ourselves to be tossed into spiritual panic by the mysteries of Revelation, because the mysteries of nature are

so manifold more confusing. Science never blushes for her inability to explain. Why should faith? Mystery is the shell in which truth lies secreted. "Here stands my lamp on my table," says Maurice Maeterlinck in one of his essays. "It contains no mystery; it is the oldest, the best known, and the most familiar object in the house. I see in it oil, a wick, a glass chimney; and all of this forms light. The riddle begins only when I ask myself what this light is, whence it comes when I call it, where it goes when I extinguish it. Then, suddenly, around this small object, which I can lift, take to pieces, and which might have been fashioned by my hands, the riddle becomes unfathomable. Gather round my table all the men that live upon this earth: not one will be able to tell us what this little flame is which I cause to take birth or to die at my pleasure. And, should one of them venture upon one of those definitions known as scientific, every word of the definition will multiply the unknown and, on every side, open unexpected doors into endless night. If we know nothing of the essence, the destiny, the life of the gleam of a familiar light of which all the elements were created by ourselves, of which the source, the proximate causes, and the effects are contained within a china bowl, how can we hope to pene-

trate the mystery of a life of which the simplest elements are situated at millions of years, at thousands of millions of leagues, from our intelligence·in time and space?" Haeckel, in the conclusion to his "Riddle of the Universe," says: "We grant at once that the innermost character of nature is just as little understood by us as it was by Anaximander and Empedocles, 2,400 years ago. We must even confess that the essence of substance becomes more enigmatic the deeper we probe into its heart."

This is all true, but let us remember, in addition thereto, that we are not called upon to comprehend the mysteries. We are not expected to grasp abstruse enigmas. "The world by wisdom knew not God." The world by wisdom never will know God. There is an easier and a more artless way. I can delight myself in the rainbow without a knowledge of optics. I can love the flowers without a treatise on botany. I can enjoy the splendour of summer without carrying about with me a volume of Ruskin. "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." "How did hate come into the world?" is a truly vexing question, but it is not half so important as how to get hate out of my heart. I am making no weak confession when I claim that Christianity never can be

explained. If it ever be explained, the explanation will mean its collapse. It was born in miracle, and it lives in miracle. Like nature, it is manifesting new miracles every morning. For nothing is so inexplicable as the man with hate driven out of his life, and love entering in, to reign instead. It is the searchless inscrutable mystery of godliness.

III. I am not ashamed, thirdly, of its *Doctrines*. They are broad and catholic and gracious. There are many doctrines in the scheme of Christianity, but there are three that are arterial. These are: the Fatherhood of God, the infinite value of the human soul, and love the life of the Cosmos. Our blessed Lord, in all His teachings, stood for these fundamentals. They constitute the essence of His Evangel. The Fatherhood of God is the greatest truth of religion. It is the highest vision man has of the infinite. And he can never have a higher. Because there is no higher possible. It colours every other truth. In its last analysis, indeed, it involves every other truth. One cannot infer the brotherhood until he first posits the Fatherhood. So it is a determining article. It determines man's valuation in the New Economy. If God is my Father, then prayer is most natural. Indeed, if God is my Father, prayer is inevitable. For it is worth reiterating

that not a single prayer of Jesus is addressed to God. They all begin with Father, my Father, holy Father, righteous Father. "What man is there of you who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone?" "His son!" This is the meaning of sin. Sin does not change the Father. His love is just the same. It changes the child. It takes the filial feeling out of his heart. It chills what in him is affectional. It was not the Father who turned his back on the old homestead: it was the son. Sin is the disowning of the Father. "He would not go in; therefore, came his father out and entreated him." This, too, is what Jesus meant when He said that the soul of man is priceless. He made men feel that they were immortal, because they were children of the Father. If a coin is lost, some one is the loser. And souls are lost. They are the Father's lost property. But they may be found, and they will be found, for Jesus is seeking them. This is the meaning of conversion. It is a turning homeward. Home is still in the same old place, and love is at the door awaiting.

Ah, too alert are we for the evil, for the depraved in human nature. We are experts in that morbid pathology. But it is alien, it is foreign, it is false; it was not the strategy of Jesus. Jesus was ever wistful and expectant

for the good. He knew it was there somewhere. He saw in every man a replica of Himself. We do not mean by this that man is a potential Christ: we do mean that he is a potential saint. He never saw "no hope" written on any human countenance. "The vilest creature had a sound spot somewhere." He recognised the royalty of humanity in the disinherited and discredited. In the very worst there throbbed a pulse capable of eternal purity. But, Master, he is dead in sin; "he hath been dead four days." True, notwithstanding he shall rise again. The deepest thing in the heart of man is not sin, but God. Sin is a stain on the fabric: it is not inwoven in the loom. We may be sepulchres, but they are sepulchres full of dead possibilities, and Christ is their resurrection and their life. No case is hopeless; no one insignificant in His eyes. And love is the life of the whole. God is love. Not only is His nature love. His law is love. His government is love. His providence is love. His gospel is love. When Jesus speaks of God, it is of the love of God. When He praises men, it is because of the love they show to each other and to Him. When He forgives a woman who is a great sinner, it is because she loved much. Where do we learn that God is love? We learn it in the school of trust and

obedience, but we learn it supremely and signally at the Cross. This leads us to the mystery of the Atonement. Paul cared more for Calvary than for any other single fact in the life of his Master. It was the very centre and soul of his theology. These truths then, be it repeated, are the vital essentials of the gospel story, and they are captivating. They are convincing. They need no learned apologists. Sadly must it be confessed that there is to-day, in some quarters, an antipathy to the great articles of our Faith. But this is largely because of accretions and additions to the simple structure once delivered to the saints. Man has been busy fashioning tenets of his own invention, but these must not be confounded with the great basal truths which Jesus taught. How few these are, but how final! The faith He preached is strong and sweet and simple and sublime. Naught is there in it that offends the conscience. Even the humblest little child is greater than all the worlds. It is beautiful; it is attractive; it is winsome; it is glorious; it is catholic; it is compelling.

IV. I am not ashamed, once more, of its *Record*. For it has a brilliant record, an unrivalled record, an inspiring record. It has been, according to James Martineau, the regenerator of the human intellect. It has been,

according to Lecky, the lever of human life. And, after all, this is the important thing. It is the life that counts. It is, indeed, almost startling to those who look about them with impartial eye, to note how little of excellence there is in the world that is not of Christian parentage. Liberty was born in the Church: so was brotherhood. So were almost all the virtues of the New Testament, indeed: to wit, humility and gentleness and temperance and peaceableness and forgiveness and self-sacrifice and sympathy and tender-heartedness and kindness. Science was born in the Church. Most of the arts, if not all of them, were nurtured at the same breast. Emerson's familiar saying, that the name of Jesus is not so much written as ploughed into the field of history, is far from being a figure. It is an arresting and victorious fact.

I cast my eyes back along the corridors of history. What a list of immortals one beholds! Here is Martin Luther poring over the Book of Romans. There is Christopher Columbus making a study of Paul's journeyings, as each morning on the unmapped ocean he patiently peered over the prow of his ship for some welcome hint of this Western shore. Yonder is David Livingstone, sitting up all night with his father, and then reading the Thirty-fourth

Psalm and holding family worship in the morning on the day that he left for wilds unknown. Far away, I see Father Damien at Calvary "beholding the sacrifice that kindled his own." Then I follow the fortunes of Wesley, of whom Southey said, "John Wesley will exercise more influence centuries hence, and maybe millenniums hence, than any other man of his age." Then there is George Fox, who, according to Professor Huxley, gained his extraordinary influence by "soaring above the clouds and tapping the fire of heaven at its fount." And once more I follow the footsteps of Florence Nightingale as she tiptoes through the wards of the hospital in the Crimea, while the soldiers, as Longfellow tells us, "turned on their cots to kiss her shadow as she passed." And then, lastly, there is Michael Faraday leaving a great audience of London scientists before whom he had been lecturing, and slipping over, unnoticed, when the after-discussion had begun, to his Church prayer-meeting, to renew his fellowship with God. And so might we go on for hours to simply cite the names of these kings and queens of service. I am not ashamed of company like that. It is choice society.

Then there is the Foreign Mission advance. Few there are to-day who are emboldened to

speak slightingly of the Foreign Mission propaganda. For even those, like Darwin, who seem disposed to question the divine authority of Jesus, are forced to confess that Christianity has carried a cargo of blessing to every country it has visited. And it has now landed on every shore. There is to-day not an island where His name has not been sung. There is not a tribe which has not yielded to Him its quota of converts. There is not a language in which the story of His passion has not been spoken. J. M. Calvert tells us that, when he arrived at the Fiji Islands, the first thing he did was to gather together the bones that had been left over from a cannibal feast the day before. He preached the gospel, and, in less than a half-century, these cannibals were sitting around the Lord's table. Robert Moffat was told that, if he went to preach to Africanus, the cruel chief would make a drinking cup out of his skull and use said skull for a drumhead. But Moffat committed himself to God, and the bloodthirsty chief was transformed into a ruling elder. Let not facts like these slip by unpondered. They are worthy the ministry of a very alert and elate imagination. The tongue that once tasted the blood of the missionary to-day tastes the wine of the Holy Communion. One hundred and twenty-five years

ago there was not a single missionary in the heathen world. To-day there is an army of almost 20,000. One hundred thousand are baptised every year. The story reads like a romance. There is nothing in Grimm or La Fontaine to transcend the thrill of it. I know not how it is that the sun creates the summer, but it does. And how Christianity makes society sweeter is passingly wonderful, but the facts are unmistakable. Everywhere it goes there follows a new civilisation, a new order, a new tone, and a new etiquette—finer, purer, happier, diviner.

So we return to the gate through which we entered. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Why should I be? It is altogether a message of love and joy and hope. I am ashamed of ecclesiasticisms. I am ashamed of Pharisaisms and ritualisms. I am ashamed sometimes of our unworthy denominationalisms. I am ashamed of the wranglings and petty jealousies of the Church. I am ashamed of the fact that there are twelve phases of Presbyterianism in our land to-day. I am ashamed of heresy trials. "Three hundred years ago two knights stood before the Emperor Charles V, one asserting and the other denying the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. The emperor bade them decide the matter with

spears upon the field of battle, which, in sooth, they did, the unhorsed one confessing his error as he lay throttled and bleeding on the gory ground." I am ashamed of that; it is preposterous; it is puerile. I am ashamed of the idea of any Church court or general assembly or Vatican attempting to decide, *ex-cathedra,* or in public gathering, what truth is. It is unreasonable; truth is not found that way. Majorities do not determine truth. Authority does not discover it. I am ashamed of the way that poor Galileo and Copernicus and Servetus were treated. I think it was shameful. Every new colonisation in the kingdom of truth has been secured for us by men who were hunted as heretics. But, when the Church sanctioned these things, it was because she had lost her Christ. It was not His blessed gospel of love. It was our poor, weak, false, human interpretation of it. The Church has done her full share of persecution. No good comes from denying facts. Voltaire, speaking of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, exclaims, "Christianity, behold thy consequences!" But it would be full as reasonable to point to the explosives that have caused the wastes of war and say, "Oh, science, behold thy consequences!" All these things were wounds in the hands and in the side of her

divine Lord. Of the gentle Jesus Himself I have never been ashamed:

> "And, oh, may this my glory be,
> That He is not ashamed of me."

# THE RICHES OF TRUST

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten."—Psalm 90: 10.

"My times are in Thy hand."—Psalm 31: 15.

## VII

# THE RICHES OF TRUST

WHAT a wonderful thing is mathematics! When I was in college, our old professor was wont to call it the "science of the gods." He meant that it is the most accurate and exact of all the "knowledges," as Bacon would say. One always knows when he is right, and he usually knows when he is wrong—in mathematics. There are no fag ends, no frayed edges, no remainders, no left-overs. Everything is delicate and clean-cut. Mathematics is one of the most fascinating and far-reaching of all the sciences. There is hardly any province of life into which it does not enter. One is not far afield, indeed, in affirming that science is built on mathematics. Nature has been called a "play upon numbers." Our God is a God of order, plan, punctuality, harmony. He is a master accountant. His columns always tally. He telleth the statistics of the stars. He weigheth the mountains in scales. He meteth out heaven with a span. He numbers the very

hairs of our heads, the beatings of our hearts. "Our times are in His hand."

We have come to the gladdest and the saddest period of the year. Only yesterday we were laughing around the Christmas holly, but already the berries are shrivelled and shrunken. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended." The fields are bare, the glory of the autumn foliage has departed. This is the last day of the month. Our minds wander among the ruins of buried memories. To-night those old bells on Broadway will ring out the old year and ring in the new.

> Good-bye, old year! Thy death
> Has taught me how the moments fly.
> What is my life but borrowed breath?
> Good-bye, good-bye!

And it may not be altogether amiss if we pause for a little at these words of the Psalmist: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten." "My times are in Thy hand." The botanist tells us that there is no soil in which a plant thrives so well as that which is formed by the decay of its own leaves. And, perhaps, there is nothing more helpful to the soul's growth than meditations on one's own mortality. So let us look at the general features of the landscape in the soft light of another

after-glow. I learn from the inspired Singer three lessons. Our days are few, our days are numbered, and our days are in the Divine keeping. Let us look at these old truths, or, rather, let us look *into* them, as we say farewell to the old friend who is leaving us.

I. Our days are few. It will be observed that the Psalmist does not say, "Our years are threescore and ten." He uses an odd expression, "The days of our years"; his purpose being to impress upon our hearts that our time is not a matter of years, but of days. The mariner does not say, "It is so many yards from here to Liverpool"; he says knots. The architect does not figure the height of his building in fractions of a furlong; his unit of measurement is the foot. Making the standard small, implies that the distance is small; making it great, argues that the distance is great. The astronomer speaks of light miles.

As I was sitting in my room writing last evening, all of a sudden the clock stopped. The effect was startling. There was such a catacomb stillness! Quickly the thought flashed that some day this human clock is going to stop. The pendulum will cease swinging. I wonder when. I wonder where. *That no* man knoweth. One thing only is certain, it cannot be far away. Every breeze that moans through

these pines across the avenue yonder whispers the same sad truth—not far away. Everything is temporal, passing. The fragrance dies, the flavour weakens, the rocks crumble. I stood before Leonardo's great painting the other day in Milan, and, alas! it is fading. Only with difficulty can one define the faces. But look at the picture our Father flings upon that canvas in the West. In an instant, it is gone; a moment more and, lo! there is another. He can make pictures so easily that He only holds them while the eye twinkles. But, ah! this visible man feels the wear and weight of the unpitying years. The eye gets dim, the ear loses its acuteness, the limbs forget their firmness, the feet their fleetness.

> "A thousand summers kiss the leaf,
> Only one the sheaf.
> A thousand springs may deck the tree,
> Only one the leaf,
> Only one and that one brief."

Geoffrey Chaucer took a fifty-three years' lease of a house in Westminster on the very spot where Henry the Seventh's Chapel now stands, but he lived in it less than one year. There is most likely not a child here this morning who will see another century. When Tennyson went down to the brook and sat on the bank, the thought that crowded him was the staying

character of the stream, "For men may come and men may go, but I go on forever." But Tennyson was mistaken. The brook is changing every flash-light. Nothing so inconstant as a brook! It is an ever fickle fluid. "You cannot bathe twice in the same river," said Heraclitus. The Hudson here is a new Hudson at every curve of its course. I went to San Francisco after the earthquake. I could not sleep the first night. The fear obsessed me that any moment the hotel might possibly come tumbling down. And we live in an earthquaky world. Any day it, and all the works that are therein, may be dissolved. It is said that the scaffolding has never been taken down from Cologne Cathedral. No sooner was the structure completed than decay began its disorganising havoc. And no sooner are we well on the way than we begin to waste. The Pantheon is two thousand years old, but it is crumbling. Time moves in a straight line, the philosopher remarked, never in a circle. Time is not a clock. We say that January comes round to January. Oh, yes, the seasons do, but time does not. Time hath no New Year's day. New Year's day is purely arbitrary. It is but a starting-point, a convenience for reckoning.

"I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day." Who said that? 'Twas

Jesus who said that. Did you observe the urgency? What is it but the creeping of the twilight that He felt? Is it not a wonderful thing that this Child of the Eternal should have felt the temporalness of things? His ear was ever alert to catch the message of the fleeting hours. He feeds five thousand people: then He says, "Gather up the fragments"; solicitous for the crumbs! So in the matter of time. From everlasting He is God, and yet He counts the minutes. My brother, there are but twelve hours in the day, and not many days. Have you awakened to that alarming reflection? When Daniel Webster made his last visit to John Adams, the aged ex-President said: "I am as well as a man of ninety could expect. You see, I am afflicted with an incurable disease—old age. My house is getting very shaky, and, so far as I can see, the landlord is not going to make any more repairs."

This old body is very decidedly a resultant of the years. It ages. We try hard to keep it out of the grave, but 'tis uphill work. It was never intended to last more than so long. Only it is well to remember, too, that age is more than a matter of clocks and chronoscopes. We call the man of threescore and ten an old man. Maybe he is. Maybe he is not. It all depends. Some are old at forty, and some

are young at seventy. There are other factors in the equation besides that of chronology.

> "We live in deeds not years,
> In thoughts not breaths,
> In feelings not in figures on the dial;
> We should count time by heart beats.
> He lives most who thinks most,
> Feels the noblest,
> Acts the best."

II. Our days are numbered. How full nature is of the laws of number! Take chemistry! A chemical compound is formed in certain numerical proportions. You cannot form it apart from these proportions. You cannot alter these proportions. If you want hydrochloric acid, you will find it imperative to bring together one part of hydrogen and thirty-five and a half of chlorine. Thirty-six will not do. It must be thirty-five and one-half. One atom of mercury will unite with two atoms of chlorine to form corrosive sublimate, but it must be one and it must be two. In the laboratory we learn that all the elements have their numerical equivalents. Nitrogen enters into union with other bodies by the number fourteen, and phosphorus by the number thirty-one, and arsenic by seventy-five, and copper by sixty-three and one-half, and silver by one hundred and eight, and gold by one

hundred and ninety-six. These figures are unalterable, inexorable. A chemical compound is an ironclad thing. Tea and strychnine are composed of the same elements, only differently numbered. A slip in the ratio means poison. Or instance the astronomer. Astronomy, like chemistry, rests on the strictest geometry. Eclipses and transits and perihelions and tidal waves can be predicted and computed with an exquisite nicety that puzzles us laymen. The mariner never doubts the astronomer. He believes in arithmetic. He can add and subtract and multiply and divide. He may not have seen land for months, but, given his instruments and his nautical almanac, and at any hour of the day he can tell to a span where he is. His quadrants, chronometers, and dead reckonings all may fail, but the sun never fails. The North Star is reliable.

And, were it necessary, we might further cite the laws of colour and spectrum analysis. It is all a sporting with numbers. All colour is resolvable into wave-vibrations, and they have all been ciphered. The number of waves necessary to produce the colour red is 39,000 in an inch. The number required to produce yellow is 44,000 in an inch. All the waves in the rainbow have been counted. Or glance at the vegetable kingdom: all parts of the plant

are geometrically arranged. Flowers and foliage do not grow promiscuously. Leaves do not shoot out anywhere in wild lawlessness. They have a determined order, a fixed point of location. " Not a leaf varies from its proper position any more than a planet from its orbit." There is no chance work in botany or forestry. If a flower has five sepals, it has also five petals of the corolla alternating with them, and five, or some multiple of five, in the pistils. Palms and lilies run in threes or multiples of three; ferns and mosses in twos and fours. No moss is ever seen with an odd number. This it is that Whittier refers to in " Snow Bound ":

> "In tiny spherule traced with lines
> Of nature's geometric signs."

The framework of the human body is constructed on the basis of the number five. The feathers in the wings and tails of birds are found to be invariably the same—birds of the same species. We are told that the hairs of our head are all numbered. One surely should not find it so impossible to credit this when we learn the accuracy there is in all things else. If the scales of the fish are counted, why not the hairs of the head? If the vibrations in the colour red are counted—39,000 in an inch, 447,000,000,000,000 in a second—why not our

steps and the number of our days and the ordering of our ways? Is it so very incredible? If God is mathematical in nature, why may He not also be mathematical in human nature?

This is the plea of the Psalmist. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten." Our days are computed, our career is mapped, our way is ordered. The whole field has been staked out accurately. We will go to our offices so many times. Some one does the reckoning. The sun rose this morning at five minutes after seven. It will set at twenty-four minutes before five, and all the dynamos round Gibraltar cannot hurry or hinder its decline. We have a modern invention called the time lock. It is seen in every vault of safe deposit. When the door is shut, and the opening timed for a certain hour, no combination can turn the bolt and swing it ajar until that hour arrives.

This, too, was the teaching of the Master. If God has given you a certain work to do, there is no power to harm you till that work is done. If it is an eight hours' task, you will have eight hours in which to finish it. This is not fatalism. It is Fatherhood. It is love. If God did not want you, He would not have created you. There is plenty of time to do your work, but none to lose. Plenty of light

to see your duty, but none to waste. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." So never run away from danger if you are in the line of duty. If a man is led by God, he will be led to victory. You have your day. Its morning and evening have been fixed. Nothing can shorten it. Nothing can lengthen it. It is only wickedness that does not live out half its time. Never call a good life fragmentary. You do not know. There is nothing premature about a good man's death. When we think so, we forget that men serve Him yonder as well as here. It is only the sinner's death that is untimely. Life is not measured by years. "Man is immortal till his work is done." That was the faith of Paul and Luther and Livingstone and all the sainted immortals. He who telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by name, has assured us that in His book all our members were written which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them, and that since we were born He preventeth our steps. "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord."

Have you ever studied the divine fatalism of Jesus? How nothing could harm Him till His appointed time. "They sought therefore to take Him and no man laid his hand on Him

because His hour was not yet come." Ah, me, how vast is the region of the unknown! Compared with what we do not know, how little, how lamentably little, is what we know! Why did we wake up in the twentieth century rather than the sixteenth? Why here rather than there? Why white rather than black or copper-coloured? Why America rather than Corea? Is it all chance? William Watson calls man "the child of a thousand chances 'neath the indifferent sky." Is that your faith? If it is, it is a comfortless faith. It is heartless, hopeless, cruel, sad. I do not want it. You are welcome to whatsoever gladness it may give. But is it not logical? men say. Fudge! what cares the heart for logic? Man, you cannot live on logic. You need love. "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may." And that Divinity is my Father. And He knows. And He cares. And He plans everything for my good. I see a providence approaching. It is due to-morrow. It has been travelling my way from the beginning. I will meet it to-morrow, and my whole life will be changed. It may be a face or a picture or a book or a burden or a death or a birth. But, if I am in the line of duty, if I run not away, if I accept the burden, some day I shall be surprised. The

burden will become a blessing. The weight will be a weight of glory—an exceeding weight of glory. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are unseen are eternal."

III. Our days are in God's hands. And this is not calling us to put on sackcloth, for, if they are in God's hands, they are in good hands. They surely could not be in better keeping. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Is it? God is love. Is it a fearful thing to fall into the hands of love? Yes, as a rebel. But for the Christian it is a blessed experience. For the Christian the fall is a flight, the sinking is a soaring, the prostration is a promotion. It means slipping into the clasp of his Father.

And, if this be so, how foolish a thing is worry! How undutiful! How distrustful! Nothing has any power against us. No evil can harm us. No plague can come nigh our dwelling. Some one speaks of drinking the cup of affliction. Well, what if we are called upon to drink it? It is only a cupful: even if we are made to drink it all, it cannot hurt us.

Our Heavenly Father will not give any of us more than we can bear. This is a sanitary age. Hardly can we drink a glass of milk to-day but the doctors are warning us of the danger. Between bugs and bacteria we are well-nigh afraid to eat. But, if "my times are in His hand, why should I doubt or fear?" Accidents! There are none. Catastrophes! The word is obsolete in the vocabulary of faith. Do not worry. Do not hurry. Do not scamp your work. Do not borrow trouble. "Fret not thyself." We are to walk by faith, and faith implies the gloaming. God takes His own time, because all time is His own. Jesus was never in a hurry. In His life there is determination, but never haste. We have not passed this way heretofore, but He has, and He knows every turn in the road. He knoweth the end from the beginning. So let us trust. The step from here to over there we all must take. It is a step into the unknown. We are to be on tiptoe all the while, always expecting something beautiful and gracious. Happy the man who can say with the sun-dial that Hazlitt saw in Italy, "I make record of only the hours of sunshine." Remember, if clear vision had been better for us, we should have had it; but clear vision is not ours, and so it cannot be best for us. And, mean-

while, the trip is fascinatingly interesting. The night may be dark, but the morning will be cloudless.

I remember reading a story about a man called Billy Bray, the famous Cornish miner. He was quite a well-known character in his day. In his last illness, he was taken down to the seashore, and the fishermen used to take him out in their boats. On one such occasion a storm arose and the sea was lashed into fury. One of the sailors said to him, " Mr. Bray, are you not afraid of the storm?" " Afraid?" said Billy Bray. " Why should I be afraid? If my Father has more work for me ashore, He will not let me drown. If He has nothing more for me to do, I should as lief go to heaven by sea as by land." This is not Stoicism, nor is it Fatalism. It is what Dr. Rendel Harris calls, in Greek, " Ataraxia," undisturbedness—the peace which comes of Vision. Glorious victory! What with it can compare? When Christ is ours, all things are ours, the present is ours, the future is ours. Come what may, we are but going home. So let us learn the secret of putting our life where it belongs. Forget not that you are in His hands anyway, only be not there rebelliously. Be there joyfully, cheerfully. " Accept the universe " was the way Margaret Fuller phrased it. This is

the riches of trust. Time is like a rented house; it belongs to the proprietor. It is not ours to do with as we please. It is a loan. "My" time, but "thy" hand. We are trustees. Dr. Johnson, on his twenty-eighth birthday, wrote in his diary, "To-day is my twenty-eighth birthday; I will try to pass it so that I can think of it without regret on the day of my departure." Frances Willard says: "We have cast anchor just for a little while beside this island of a world, but we are bound for the continent of Immortality, and since the ship must so soon lift its anchor, since its gleaming sails beckon us now even as a friend's hand toward yonder fair and mystical horizon, let us take on board a cargo which shall be worth something in the country where we are to spend the longest time. Then fix your eyes upon the fadeless vision; for whosoever has that hope or expectation in his soul cannot be balked or daunted." Herein, too, lies the key to growing old. Autumn, some one says, is the romance of age. There are no such colours in spring as are to be found in autumn. In autumn we sight all the shades of the spectrum. What gold! What grandeur! What glory! Full oft we hear it said that, as people grow older, their dress ought to become quieter. It is not fitting, we think, for that old lady

to be decked in colours. Let her wear a becoming black. But not thus does nature think. "It is in age that nature wears the brush of a Rubens and imitates the rainbow." If we fade as the leaf, we fade gorgeously. Our last days are our brightest days. They are fuller of glow and lustre and beauty. Old age should be the loveliest season. The plumage of young swans is a black, ugly, dingy colour, but as they grow older they become snow-white. Thus, too, should we draw near our triumph. White is the colour of the bride. "It is the sacrament of what is glad." It is the symbol of purity and victory. "He that overcometh shall be clothed in white."

"He came to my desk with a quivering lip,
The lesson was done;
'Dear teacher, I want a new leaf,' he said,
'I have spoiled this one.'
In place of the leaf so stained and blotted,
I gave him a new one, all unspotted,
And into his sad eyes smiled,
'Do better now, my child.'

"I went to the throne with a sin-stained soul,
The old year was done;
'Dear Father, hast Thou a new leaf for me?
I have spoiled this one.'
He took the old leaf, stained and blotted,
And gave me a new one, all unspotted,
And into my sad heart smiled,
'Do better now, my child.'"

"I know not where I'm going,
But I do know my Guide;
And with childlike faith I give my hand
To the Friend that's by my side;
And the only thing I ask of Him
As He takes it, is hold it fast;
Suffer me not to lose my way,
But bring me home at last."

# THE RICHES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking our own assembling together, but exhorting."—Hebrews 10:24.

## VIII

## THE RICHES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

AND let us observe cautiously the setting. "Having then such a free access and approach to God, let us draw near in fulness of faith. And let us hold fast the confession of our hope so that it be not shaken. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, but exhorting."

Provocation is one of those sinister words that carry a sting. It is usually used in a venomous sense. What a provoking man he is, we say! What a provoking woman! She always calls out the bad that is in me, stirs the embers of my evil nature, irritates me, ruffles me, rubs me the wrong way. "I'm provoked at that fellow"—a gentle way of expressing our resentment, only carrying the further idea that there is a legitimate reason for our ill-will, that he has wrought us a wrong and summoned up our slumbering sense of justice. The word, in its modern usage, bears this unfriendly meaning.

And the Greek original in the passage before us is essentially strong—paroxysmos, our word paroxysm, to sharpen—a weapon with a pointed, painful edge. It is used on three other occasions in the New Testament. When the great Apostle to the Gentiles went to Athens, we are told that "His spirit was cut within him as he beheld the city full of idols." When a misunderstanding unfortunately arose between himself and Barnabas, it is called a "sharp contention"—the same word being swept into service. And, in the immortal love lyric to the Corinthians, we read that "love is not provoked." This is the thought to which the word is, for the most part, attached in the sacred writings. It has a defiant aspect. But, in the verse before us, this aspect is removed as a mask. It beams down upon us with kindly regard. It comes with healing, not hurt, in its wings; with balm, not scourge and bleeding. We are not to incite to paroxysms of fear or passion. We are to affect each other acutely to love and good works, and to the joys and privileges of public worship.

How unfortunate that so many of our English derivatives have lost the fresh innocence of childhood! Instance our word charity. It was at first a visitor most welcome—open, sincere, artless, friendly, gladsome. Much that

we mean by love the Apostles meant by charity. To-day, however, the root has been beggared of its wealthy content and it has fallen from its envied pedestal. It has become well-nigh a verbal ruin. We tolerate it—that is all. We do not greet it gladly. It carries with it a disparaging intention. It denotes mainly the giving of alms. "Cold as charity," do we not say? Thuswise, also, is it with this word provoke. It means literally to call forth. But how much more beautiful to call forth the good rather than the bad, the bright rather than the dark, the noble rather than the selfish and malign. Chaucer says, "Christianity provokes a man's better nature." Cowper says, "The sight provokes a smile." Gray, in his "Elegy," asks, "Can honour's voice provoke the silent dust?" And Paul adds, "Provoking one another to love and good works and the exhortation and inspiration of public communion." Let us, then, glance for a moment at this lofty plane to which the Apostle beckons us.

I. Provoking to love. There are two words for love in the New Testament; the one used here like the word for provoke being the strong word. It is a word born within the bosom of revealed religion. There is no instance of its use in any heathen writer. It is more than superficial or sentimental; it is radical. It is a

searching word. It reaches down to the roots of character. It is the word outlined by the Apostle in his matchless ode in First Corinthians, "Love is not provoked." There is a love which is provoked sometimes, but 'tis not this love. This love is above provocation. It is not simply an effeminate amiableness; it is a strong masculine crusade. It is God-like.

And we are to motive men towards this exalted and tranquil and long-suffering ideal. It is the call of the Christ. It was His *modus operandi.* The miner goes out in search of hid treasure. It is gold, not dross, that he seeks. Sometimes what looks the most unpromising yields the richest percentage. And there is wealth in the poorest-looking human stuff. The mission of Jesus was to mine it. He came to seek and to save what in us is lost, to lift into evidence the worth and the wealth that are hidden in the soul.

> "In men whom men condemn as ill
> I find so much of goodness still,
> In men whom men pronounce divine
> I find so much of sin and blot,
> I hesitate to draw the line
> Between the two, when God has not."

The Master knew what was in man, and so He believed in him. The only sure way, after all, of saving is the old, tried, and proven way

of trusting and loving. Trust disarms hostility. Contempt of humanity was the arch-sin to Jesus. When Jesus wanted an illustration of iniquity in its scarlet distinctness, He did not go, as we usually do, to the saloon or the slum or the tenderloin. He went to the home of the Pharisee. To Him respectable sin was the great sin—pride, selfishness, hate, hard-heartedness, jealousy, malice, hypocrisy, unbelief, suspicion. "Hath no man condemned thee? No man, Lord. Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." Livingstone went unarmed through Africa, and was only once assailed. Stanley went, primed and panoplied, and he had to blaze his way and mark it by little brooklets of blood. Treat men as thieves and they will steal; treat them as wolves and they will tear; treat them as dogs and they will bite. But treat them as children of the Father and they will respond splendidly to the lifting appeal. Because, at bottom, the soul of man is sound. The deepest thing in the heart is its essential goodness. Men are not intrinsically base. They are inherently true and noble. The innermost reality is God, not sin. Never let your child see that you doubt his honour. It will paralyse his virtue. Mrs. Booth says that, when she goes to a criminal, she always appeals to his future, not his past. There is an

old French proverb which says that he who would labour for his fellowmen must see as little as possible of them. This was not the estimate of Tennyson when he wrote, " Utter knowledge is utter love." Jesus did not doubt Mary Magdalene. He never despaired of any child. His gracious procedure was by way of encouragement.

" Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but nurture them." " Nourish them." It is the tender plant that needs nurturing. It denotes a fostering solicitude. The word has a warm, gentle, healing touch. Husbands, love your wives, for " no man ever hated his own flesh, but nurtureth and cherisheth it." It is a home word, and love is the law of the home. The raw, chill atmosphere of fault-finding is fatal in the home. Elsewhere we read, " Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath that they be not discouraged." To discourage is to harden, to solidify, to seal up, to check, to silence, to crush, to destroy. To nurture is to train, to lead out, to educate, to cause to flow in warm, evoking life-giving virtue. In mining, quicksilver is utilised to separate the precious metal from the ore. The mercury runs about, lays hold of what is valuable, and extracts it. Then, with the application of heat, its grip is loosened and the bullion is detached.

We, too, should be balls of mercury, ever on the alert for what is priceless and superlative in the heart of man.

> "Down in the human heart,
> Crushed by the tempter,
> Feelings lie buried
> That grace can restore.
> Touched by a loving hand,
> Wakened by kindness,
> Chords that are broken
> Will vibrate once more."

Oh, the world of needless wretchedness! How we provoke to anger! How much pain about us is preventable! How we pour in vinegar and nitre into the wound to hurt and irritate and inflame! The sour look, the ungracious speech, the harrowing tale, the keen, cutting criticism, the inhumanity, the husband nagging the wife, the wife taunting the husband, the thoughtless unkindness, the lack of appreciation—this makes the woeful world that need not be, that should not be. In a landscape the objects are always the same. But how differently it responds under cold and cloud and rain from what it does when the sun is softening all its features with a mellow splendour! Men there are who are down on the New Testament because of its gentleness. They deal in blood and iron and granite. But Jesus pitched His life upon the key of kindness. For Him

to live was to love and to pour oil on the tempestuous waters. In one of his essays, Mr. Arthur C. Benson tells of a serious illness he once had. He had a fall from a tree, and for two weeks his life hovered doubtfully round the border-line. In fact, he was given the sacraments of the Church. When convalescing, he began to jot down the thoughts that possessed him during that critical juncture. "I cared not," he says, "for my personal successes, nothing for what little position I had gained, nothing for the books I had written. What alone concerned me was the thought that I had helped some poor pilgrim and made his way easier and straighter and smoother."

II. Provoking, secondly, to good works. Beautiful works, rather! To hearten is to put heart into. And this is our calling. We are to urge each other to the doing of beautiful things. We are to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. We are to lure to the levels of ornamental living.

And the method suggested is by way of encouragement. How much failure to-day is due to simple loss of courage! How many give up through sheer dispiritedness! It is not sin that kills; it is despair. Almost any lapse can be recovered, if there be only heart and hope and will-power left. John Bunyan makes the

pilgrim meet every conceivable obstacle in his journey to the City Celestial, but the difficulty most intimidating was Giant Despair. When Pilgrim met this Goliath he thought very seriously of retracing his steps. And this most surely he would have done had he not discovered a little key in his bosom, called Hope. When hope is gone, all is gone. When hope fades, the vision is lost. This it is that is the meaning of our present-day suicide epidemic. "No use trying," the *felo-de-se* says. But how foolish! How wickedly false! Man, cast down into the depths and crushed, there is every use trying. "Why art thou cast down, oh my soul, and why art thou disquieted within thee?" "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, oh Jehovah. Oh Israel, hope in Jehovah! For with Him is plenteous redemption and in Him is everlasting strength."

The world to-day is pining for encouragement. It is a tonic the heart of man loves. Sir Walter Scott was shy and diffident as a lad. It was said at school that he was even stupid. But the day the boy met Burns was his birthday. Burns read some lines he wrote, then, patting him on the head, said, "You'll be a man yet, ma laddie." Little Walter, we are told, went home and wept for joy. What now could daunt him? Had not the idol of his day

regarded him? When Byron's mother called her boy a " lame brat," she was endowing him with a heritage of hate. " Your mother is a fool," said a playmate to the limping lad one day. " I know it," replied the future poet, and burst into tears. Schopenhauer's mother was jealous of him and hated him cordially. These would be coarse, rough treatments in the training of a colt. How infinitely more so in the culture of a soul. The more delicate the adjustment, the more easily damaged. It is because the equilibrium of the collodion is unstable that the photographer makes his negative. And some have natures so mobile and impressible that often a mere handshake will change their whole lives, just as a current of hydrogen gas passing over a piece of polished platinum will take fire, or the touch of a feather cause the iodide of nitrogen to explode. Wonderful, indeed, are the transformations in the laboratory of the chemist, but they are as nothing to those in the laboratory of the soul. It was Benjamin West, was it not, who said, " A kiss from my mother made me a painter." Have you ever seen a radiometer? It is an instrument for measuring radiant energy. It consists of a number of light discs blackened on one side and placed in an exhausted glass vessel. And it is so sensi-

tive to light that, when even a match is struck in the room where it is placed, the arms begin to rotate. Even so a look sometimes, especially if it be a look of love, a thought, a memory of home and mother, a prayer for one far distant, will not infrequently turn the footsteps into the paths of righteousness.

Here is a mother I have known with her child. She says, in the morning, "Now, my dear, we will go for a ride to-day." At the appointed hour the child is got ready and the automobile drives to the door. But, just as they are about to enter, she changes her mind and her plans, and the outing is postponed. Next week, something of a similar nature is undergone. It is a more or less occasional experience. She is educating her child, she says, in the school of disappointment. Some one asks her, "My dear woman, why this strange curriculum?" She answers, "The world is full of hopes not realised, and I am training my child to be ready for them." But is not that a very astonishing discipline? Think you it is needful or helpful or wise? Are not men and women—aye, and children, too—hungering rather for a little partnership of cheer? How many are tugging at the load and every now and then looking timidly to the grade. How a whisper of hope would hearten them! I

have seen the farmer driving his team up the steep incline and stopping every little while to give the tired, faithful animals a breathing space. And I have seen him take a lump of sugar and patting them on the back, with endearing words, give it to the noble creatures. And, then, I have watched the slow, heavy pull resumed. It was a wondrous reinforcement. A morsel of sweetness did what a stick or a scourge could never have done. The story that Dale of Birmingham tells is illuminating. He was walking down the street one blue Monday morning in a faint, forbidding mood. A poor old woman, as she passed him, turned and spoke, "Good-morning, Dr. Dale; God bless you." He looked up and inquired her name, but she was gone. And it will be remembered that the great preacher goes on to tell how the clouds began to roll away, not because one of the great of earth had noticed him, but because one of the humble toilers had given him a cup of cold water and filled his heart with freshness and joy.

Woman, what is your attitude toward your domestics? Are you slipping hope into their lives? Did you ever watch the embers of a dying fire? Did you put some fresh kindling on? And did you then try to blow it into warm and welcome flame? Can you not do

that with some flickering, faint-hearted life? In one of George Eliot's great character studies we are brought face to face with what a whisper of encouragement can do. Bulstrode was a rich banker. For twenty years he had been living in Middlemarch, one of her first citizens. He had married into one of the influential families of the community and was a leader in church and state. Then one cold morning, in late autumn, an old drunken delinquent staggered into his office. Raffles had known Bulstrode in early life, but, by giving him one hundred pounds, the banker had bribed him to silence and the promise to leave the city forthwith and never again return. But, in less than six months, he broke his promise and it cost the banker two hundred pounds more. Then liquor made him loquacious and he scattered to right and left the story of Bulstrode's low birth and dishonest early gains, that the foundation of his future was lain in sin and shame and womanly dishonour. He laid the banker bare as an object of scorn. The revelation of these ugly disclosures came like a thunderbolt to the palatial home of the banker. The wife had never pried into the early life of her husband, and he had ever been discreetly silent. But to the daughters in society it was a mortifying shock of grievous shame. It was

eight o'clock in the evening when the door opened and the wife entered. He dared not look at her. With eye bent down he sat, and seemed shrunken and smaller. A great wave of pity surged through her like a tidal swell. Placing her hand on his shoulder, she said, "Nicholas, look up; notwithstanding, I love still." And they wept together. No further word was spoken. Her promise of fidelity was silent. He read her purpose to bear his shame —and that moment a soul was born for truth and life. Dickens, perhaps, is the great optimist of romance. He was of sympathy all compact. He struck many a telling blow for the divinity of simple kindness. And one is tempted to doubt sometimes if he ever sketched anything finer than when he drew the development of Sidney Carton. Sidney was a shiftless, worthless barrister in the English courts. He loved Lucy Darnay, the daughter of an old doctor. And Lucy told him that she believed in him and would always be his friend. Such trust was inspiriting. It evoked to heroism. It burned out the dross of his nature. It made him unselfish and brave and true. And, when Lucy gave her love to another, his devotion waned not. For, even when her lover was seized and flung into prison and condemned to death, Sidney joyfully stole in, put on the

prison garb, and gave his rival liberty. And to the guillotine he went, "sublime and prophetic," dying like the hero that he was. But the point to be regarded is that it was not his love for her so much as her faith in him that provoked the Christ-like sacrifice. Wondrous and past understanding is the power of confidence and encouragement. It kindles and lights up what is noble. "To the pure all things are pure." Jack London has written for us a story which he entitles the "Call of the Wild." It is the story of how a dog, under ill-treatment, loses every trace of gentleness and goes back to his lupine ancestry. Another writer gives us another story which she names the "Call of the Good." And it is the tale of how one of earth's unfavoured ones, under love's provocation, becomes a child of the King, and goes not back, but forward to her bright and beckoning birthright.

III. But we are to stimulate one another toward yet another goal—the joys and privileges of public worship. "Fellowship is heaven, lack of it is hell," said William Morris. We are perfected in union. Each strengthens the other. "As in water face answereth to face so the heart of man to man." We are comrades in the struggle. Christians should have such a bond of sympathy and brotherhood be-

tween them that they would be ever eagle-eyed and alert for mutual recovery. Catching the backslider on the slippery decline and steadying him to the level again: in moments when the ascent is steepest, each lending the other a push, a pull, a lift, an impulse. The member of Christ's church should be not only a decoy, a lure to woo the outsider into the fold. He should be a rod, a staff, a support, a comfort to those already within. We are to strengthen as well as introduce: we are to establish as well as inaugurate: we are to train soldiers as well as enlist them. Like the Alpine climber, we are all beaded together and the slipping away of one endangers all. George Matheson calls the Church "the League of Pity." How delightful the designation!

Ah, there would be fewer meditating desertion in our congregational families if we were all thus-minded, if we were ever found on the trail of the faint, feeble follower with some ministry of cheer. There would be fewer lapses from our membership. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in any trespass ye who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness." Is it not here that the Church so lamentably fails in her duty? Do not the secret orders leave us ofttimes far arear? Heliotropes and violets are said to have a mu-

tual sympathy with each other, each reacting helpfully on the other. And we, too, can dispose toward health and growth and beauty. Sometimes a clasp of the hand will do it. Sometimes a simple smile works wonders. There are recorded cases of recovery accomplished by the smile cure. A look may soften a hard heart; it did Peter's. Did not our word hospital originally mean a hospitable place? The Church to-day is faint and famishing for the wine of warmth and hospitality. What cold ice-boxes our visible Communions are! What poor bungling nurses we are in the hospital of the spirit! Hear, then, once more the wooing words of the Apostle. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, let us hold fast the confession of our faith that it waver not, and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and beautiful works, not forsaking our own assembling together as the custom of some is, but rather exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day drawing nigh."

# THE RICHES OF REFUGE

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh."—Psalm 2:4.

## IX

# THE RICHES OF REFUGE

DID you ever question a Bible sentence? Did you ever say, "I do not believe it; I cannot believe it"? Did you ever read a chapter and stop confounded? Did you feel deep down in your heart, "I wish that wasn't there; I would we had an abridged edition of the book"?

In the 137th Psalm we hear the sobbing of the exiles by the streams of Babylon. The harp is hanging silent on the weeping willow. The people were too sad for even plaintive music. 'Tis an exceeding tender lyric. But the singer's love for the Holy City makes him revengeful, and the heartless denunciation of the last verse comes with a shock of piercing pain. To regard it as an inspiration of perfect thought is inconceivable. Full oft the Psalmists walk in a human world. Not infrequently their hymnology is purely military and sounds a savage note. As civilisation advances, and that glad day draws near when war will be seen to be a crime, much of the Old Testament will

become barbaric. The 109th Psalm is a bold battle song, but, now that the battle is over, the song has lost its inspiring bugle call. There is no other acceptable interpretation than that such hymns belong solely to the days when they were sung.

The Bible is, indeed, a marvellous literature. There are staggering passages in its pages. One can have but little patience with that pious air that can see no perplexities in the book. Does not even Peter speak of his beloved brother Paul as penning some things hard to be understood? These very difficulties to some of us have caused many a headache, many a heartache. Full many a time have we bumped our bewildered brains in the dark against some of these stone walls and cried for light. And, if I may be pardoned the liberty of a personal confession, one of the things that led me into the ministry was the desire—presumptuous, to be sure, but nevertheless earnest—to make a few crooked places straight and a few rough places plain to the limping, stumbling pilgrim. How vividly I can remember, as a boy, sitting under discourses that I knew were a caricature of our Heavenly Father. Indeed, one of my earliest memories was listening to a sermon from this very text and saying to a friend, as we strolled home slowly together, "Well, if

that is what is meant by being a Christian, I fear I cannot be one." There are scores of young men to-day whose faith is being clouded by theories that are untenable in the light of modern learning. A great many articles in our theology are not of cardinal concern. If they are false, no one is harmed. It matters little or nothing, for instance, whether we believe in a physical resurrection or a spiritual. Either will carry us over the tide. It makes no difference with some problems whether we figure them out wrong or figure them right. Even guessing does no serious damage. We may be hopelessly wide of the mark in our theory of the Cosmos or the millennium; our ideas may be fatuous and foolish and no mischief be forthcoming, but, if we are given a foolish notion of the Infinite, the mischief is momentous. Our spiritual catastrophe is liable to be complete.

Some one has said that the first duty of a Christian is not to do good, not even to be good, but to be sure that God is good. And, surely, the best faith we can have is the one that gives us the best ideas of God. Sometimes we hear it said, "It matters nothing what one thinks about the 'Great First Cause.'" Matters nothing? Why, it matters everything. Indeed, what one thinks of the Great First

Cause would seem to some of us to be about the only thing that does matter for spiritual defence. Given a mechanical God, and fatalism without fail follows. Given a tyrannical God, and, like some great wave of poison, there flows forth an inquisition. Given a pusillanimous God, and there results, in individual and nation, moral decadence. But given the Father God of Jesus, and there issue tenderness and strength and trust and obedience, and love and likeness, and the sunshine of joy, and the smile of little children.

But let us return to the text, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." This is surely a bold and baffling affidavit. It challenges enquiry; it provokes contradiction and defiance. It comes as a dash of ice water on the face. What, we hear it said, God laughing at us! It is impossible; it cannot be; it must be a translator's mistake. How does the Revised Version construe the clause? Well, here it is, "He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh." Just one word changed—shall to will,—and the change is for the worse, because will is the stronger word, denoting, as it does, decision. Mayhap the context will give relief. "He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh; the Lord will have them in derision." No, there is no deliverance here. The passage is plain. It is in

the Book. It is one of the Psalms, and not an imprecatory psalm either. It cannot be ruled out, cannot be explained away. It is a straight, avoidless statement with no strings attached—"He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh."

So let us turn our thoughts to the mystic message; let us try to gain the viewpoint of the inspired singer, and, perhaps, it will be wise to make our approach by the old cautious pathway of exclusion.

I. And we can surely step with safe and confident tread when we say that the Psalmist cannot mean that the good, kind Father laughs at our *Infirmities*. That needs no long or hard belabouring. Can you conceive of yourself laughing at the malformation of your fellow-creatures? When you see a poor blind beggar tapping his uncertain way along the curbstone, does it provoke your amusement? When you meet some unlucky cripple hobbling along the sidewalk, does it tickle you to merriment? Do you enjoy that kind of music? The thought is unthinkable and calls for no reply.

The nobler and richer the nature, the bigger the bump of compassion. Pity is the stamp of moral greatness. The murderer lacks pity; the tyrant lacks pity. But the Child of the King is pitiful. The very sight of sorrow sends a pang to his heart. Pity is the proof of no-

ble resource. The loftier one mounts the ladder of goodness, the more tenderly does he survey the maladies of men. To grow in grace is to grow in far-reaching compassion. The old world knew no pity for misfortune. Infirmity was a mark of the Divine displeasure. If a man was blind, he was deservedly so, else he would not be blind. Might was the only Divine right. Instance Burns. His sympathy for "auld Nickie Ben" is one of the sweetest things in literature. It is a lasting tribute to the loftiness and quality of the great poet's heart. The thought that even the vilest wretch should live in deprivation all his days, shadowed the immortal singer with the keenest pain. His great, strong, noble nature suffered with his unfortunate brother. It was sympathy of true sterling coinage. And think you that the infinitely wise and loving Parent can stand in the presence of sorrow and affect it? That would be a shocking perversion of the Fatherhood. In all this tragedy and tearfulness about us, the most appealing sight to the great tender mercies of the Infinite must be man in his crippled helplessness. Nothing moves the human heart so deeply. How much more must it move the Divine heart. "For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust."

It was the joy of Jesus to heal the body. Most of His miracles were miracles of healing —cripples, paralytics, lepers, lunatics, sightless eyes, palsied limbs, deaf ears. And the burden of His great passion to-day is to get access to the soul in need, to gain entrance, so as to relieve its distress. It is the fundamental note in His overtures of love. "For we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

II. Let us eliminate another false line of approach. God never laughs at our *Ignorance*. Arnold, of Rugby, has told us, in classic strain, how the severest rebuke he ever got was received from the stupidest boy he had in school. He was reproving this pupil one day for his dulness. The boy replied, with tears in his eyes: "Why do you scold me, sir? I am doing my best." What think you the great schoolmaster did? Laugh at the lad? Nay, nay; too much of a gentleman was the noted educator for that. Quite the contrary, he apologised. The native dulness of the little fellow, trying, as he said, to do his best, gripped the accomplished scholar's heart and taught him a lesson he always remembered.

It is ever thus with large minds. The im-

poverishment and privation of their fellows evokes their compassion, not their mirth. Who can stroll through the hovels of a great city, on a tour of Christian inspection, and note the haunts, the wretchedness, the woe, without venting a groan? It is advantage beholding disadvantage. Does the hostess, who is a true lady, laugh at her guest? The guest may be rough and uncultured. He may have a rude, rugged exterior. He may know but little about the Chesterfieldian etiquette of the drawing-room or the dining-table, but, if he is honestly endeavouring, the kind-hearted woman does not draw herself up in haughty dimensions and laugh from her throne. One poor fellow in his awkward, yet innocent uncouthness, so the old story goes, drank the water in the finger-bowl —thinking it was lemonade. What think you the gracious hostess did? Drank it, too. Just what Jesus Christ would have done. Yes, that was grace. It was the Christ in her that did that. That was the very aroma of Christian fellow-feeling. Longfellow enjoyed a story about himself, which he was fond of passing on to his friends. He had been admitted to an audience with Queen Victoria. She held out her hand, as was her custom, for him to kneel and kiss. But the poet had not studied court etiquette and he shook it cordially. But the

kindly Victoria did not laugh at our laureate. Too much of a queen was she for that. And think you again that the King of Glory is entertained by our crudities, our rawness, our unripeness? Alas! we are so ignorant. We blunder so! We know so little, and we put on so many airs, as if we knew so much. Is not the supreme jest of history ignorance pretending to know?

One of the truest servants of the King it has ever been my privilege to know was an elder in the parish of my early ministry. He was wholly unlettered, but, with his Divine Master, he walked daily in white. No one could have been more earnest in prayer, and full oft his prayers were amusing. He knew he could not speak good English, and, if by some flank movement he could be lured into a spelling match, all would agree that he had not the faintest idea what orthography was for. He knew the boys nudged each other when he rose to speak in testimony meeting, but he was willing to be a fool for Christ's sake. One of his pet expressions in prayer was, "Oh, God, humiliate us!" Think you God smiled? Think you the Kind Father is pleased to humiliate His child? Ah, He is too gracious for that! But our poor, penitent publican in prayer meeting meant, "Oh, Lord, keep us humble, keep us

lowly!"; and, every time that petition was spoken, it rose as sweet incense to the throne. It was a fragrant flower from the garden of a loving heart.

III. Let us discard another fruitless trail from our list of impossibles. God never laughs at our *Iniquities*. He never laughs at sin. Sin is not a laughing matter up in heaven. Full oft we joke about it down here on earth. Every attempt is made to hide its ugliness. Ever and anon we smile at the poor inebriate, impotent in the gutter. But not so the angels. Our forefathers felt much the loathsomeness of sin, but to-day we hear more about the comic side of it. Some there are who would be shocked to go to a dinner without a dress-suit on, but who would feel not one whit reproached to return at midnight staggering. In a recent play from the pen of a great English writer, adultery is portrayed as a "ripple on the ocean of God's love." Robert Blatchford opines that the Cross of Jesus is funny. Another sceptic says it is vulgar. And it surely is, but wherein consists the vulgarity? It is the vulgarity of sin, is it not? The vulgarity that nailed Him there; the vulgarity that mocked and scoffed as He hung between two thieves. We do not feel the sting of contrition any more, and maybe that is why there are no saints to-day,

for, mark you, it takes a saint to fully see sin. A man must inhabit the heights to be stirred by the depths. Here is Jerusalem—hard, stony, rebellious, remote. The Christ looked down upon its unholy indifference and it moved Him to tears. Has the gilded iniquity of the city ever moved us to tears? Have you not sometimes listened to a questionable story and, out of courtesy, feigned to enjoy the indelicacy? Ah! if we had the mind of Jesus, we would drop the eye, and blush, and burn in sorrowful and consuming shame. Such things would smite us as a thick smoke stifles the breath.

And the pressing and insistent burden of revelation is that God hates sin. He never laughs at it. It grieves Him. You do not laugh when you are grieved. Sin is such a tragic thing that, when we look at it from the celestial viewpoint, all the merriment dies out of our hearts. Instance this story one of my colleagues told me but yesterday. He was called to visit a home from which the mother had been taken. She lay cold and still in the parlour. Hearing the footsteps approaching, the little children ran shivering into hiding. They feared it was the father. Oh, the pathos of it! The day was bitter cold, but not a coal was in the bin. At night the father returned, steeped in drink. He was ugly and in savage

mood. In rage, he struck his child, knocking him against the wall. In the morning, just before the funeral, the doctor said, "I really cannot say; he's a very sick boy." And, on the following morning, just as the light was beginning to peep into the windows of the cheerless tenement, that father was holding in his arms the little pulseless frame of his oldest boy and calling out in despair, "Oh, my God! what have I done?"

Why do you not laugh? "Oh, that is not a laughing matter!" you say. Verily, indeed, 'tis not. It is a bitterly weeping matter. It is the melting, harrowing tragedy of sin. Ah! when sin lays waste your boy, all the fun of it chokes in the heart. The time for God to laugh is when the sinner repents. "There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth." Of what avail is it to know that God hates sin, unless we also know that He longs to pardon sin? The sinner who only knows God as holy will be goaded to despair. Our Heavenly Father delights not in hounding the guilty *to* the lost world. He delights, rather, in saving the guilty *from* the lost world. To know God is to know God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself—"a love that will not let us go."

These, then, are the paths we pass by as not

leading us to the throne which is set upon the holy hill of Zion. Whither now shall we turn? Whither go to find the highway of Jehovah and of His anointed? How arrive at the seat of His laughter and wrath and sore displeasure?

I. I think we are on safe and certain ground when we say that He laughs at our *Idolatries*. Carlyle, in one of his essays, observes that humour is foreign to the Hebrew genius, but who that reads that 46th chapter of Isaiah can help remarking the irony thereof? It is the description of the making of an idol. "The people lavish their gold and hire a goldsmith who maketh it into a god. They bear it upon their shoulders. They carry it and set it in its place, and it standeth. From its place shall it not remove. They cry unto it, but it cannot answer." Or witness that contest on Mount Carmel. "And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, 'Choose you one bullock for yourselves and dress it and call on the name of your God.' And they took the bullock and dressed it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, 'Oh Baal, hear us.' And it came to pass at noon that Elijah said, 'Cry aloud; maybe he is musing or peradventure he sleepeth.'" Think you not there is humour in these lines? Or come to the New Testament. Two men are wending their way to the temple: the

one a Pharisee, the other a publican. "The Pharisee stands and prays thus with himself." "With himself," it will be noted. He is praying to himself. "Part of him is praying, and part is listening." As some one once remarked of Madame de Staël, "She listens to herself while she talks." It surely must be that He who sitteth in the heavens laughed at the preposterous absurdity. For man, measuring himself against the Infinite, must ever be a ludicrous spectacle. Nothing kills idolatry quicker than the cultivation of the sense of humour.

And, alas! with sorrow let it be confessed, idolatry is not a past and ancient obliquity; it is a modern offence; it is the flagrant peril of the age. The first commandment in the decalogue calls for repeated rehearsal to-day. We are bowing down to images graven and ungraven. Some make an idol of their Church, some of their confessional, some of their ritual. A distinguished churchman remarked but yesterday that, if a drunkard will but take the sacraments from duly consecrated hands, it will kill his appetite for drink. The Emperor Constantine, it will be remembered, postponed baptism until death was imminent, on the ground that baptism washed away all sin, and that sins committed after the administering

of the ordinance might be as few as possible. In reading Lord Morley's life of Mr. Gladstone, we came across the following words. They are part of a letter which the Duke of Cumberland wrote to the great commoner some seventy years ago, and they are to the effect that, "in his opinion, nothing had done the Church so much harm as the bishops abandoning wigs." The admirers of John Bunyan are just now putting a window to his memory in Westminster Abbey. But, while the immortal dreamer lived, he was persecuted and imprisoned by this very Church, and, if he were to come to life to-day, he would not be permitted to preach in the place of his memorial. For, mark you, if a nonconformist were by some strange unprecedented happening to speak in the pulpit of the great historic abbey, it would profane the temple and call for another reconsecration. There is not in the whole of the New Testament so much as the flutter of a sacerdotal robe. There are elders, prophets, apostles, evangelists, teachers, deacons, ministers, but no priests. And yet to-day "the Crucifix has become one of the greatest enemies of the Cross."

And the Lord said unto Moses: "I have seen the people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people. They have made them a golden calf and have

worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, 'These be thy gods, oh Israel.' And Moses came down from the mountain and as soon as he came nigh to the camp he saw the calf and the dancing, and his anger increased, and he took the molten image which they had made and burnt it in the fire and ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Jehovah drink of it because the anger of the Lord waxed hot." Alas! another golden calf has arisen phœnix-like, and in more stupendous dimensions, from these very ashes, and men are bowing down to it as never before and dancing and offering sacrifices. Fashion, too, lifts her altar, and Society hers, and Worldliness hers, and Intellect hers, and Sport hers, and Popularity hers. And time fails to even detail these multiple idols of the hour. But meanwhile the anger of the Lord is being kindled.

II. And now we have reached the terminal of our enquiry, the object of our quest. God laughs at our *Insurrections.* For idolatry at heart is naught but the dominion of the flesh. It is rebellion against the one true, supreme, spiritual Sovereignty. "Why do the heathen rage, and the peoples meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah

and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh." Why, this is most dramatic writing. God laughs at the people who fight Him. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." The scorner is contemptuous toward that which is sacred. "The wicked plotteth against the just and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord will laugh at him."

Take down your Milton. Turn to that tale of the rebel spirits. We can hear them chuckling with glee. They are about to topple over with their artillery the armed hosts of heaven. But the sequel! Ah, the sequel! The King just sat calmly on His quiet throne and laughed. You are students of history. What hath history to say? When Xerxes crossed the Hellespont, he lashed the waves of the sea and said, "Hush there, be still; I'm your master." But the sea and the God of the sea had him in derision, and swallowed his ships, and smashed his bridges and scattered the broken timbers thereof along the Peloponnesian shore. You are students of history. What again saith history? Voltaire fought God. He said that, in twenty years, the Almighty will see some

fine fun in Europe and that, before the end of the eighteenth century, Christianity would be mummified. It is rather a memorable rebuke that the house in which that prediction was made is to-day a depository for the Bible Society.

This summer, I took up Tom Paine's "Age of Reason." Without doubt, it is a brilliant critique. One cannot fail to admire the desperate daring of the man. He closes the fifth chapter by saying that he has gone through the Bible as a man might go through a forest with an axe felling trees. "There the books lie," he goes on; "the priests may stick them in the ground again, but they can never make them grow." Poor Paine! His "Reason" and his axe are forgotten, but the Book lives to-day in four hundred languages, the forest covers the earth. One cannot help surmising that God, up there in glory, must at least have smiled. That was a timely story reported at the time of the San Francisco earthquake, in which a little bootblack went down, after the ashes had cooled, to see if he could find his box of brushes. But, reaching the old stand, he found nothing but bricks and stones and charcoal and débris. Then, turning his grimy face toward the tottering walls, he remarked to a bystander: "Say, Cap, 'taint no use fur a feller to

think he can lick God. Jez one thing to do—take things as they come and act as if you wuz glad." Verily, indeed, the verdict of the little gamin was right.

Let us, then, take heed to our ways. "Wisdom crieth aloud in the street; she uttereth her voice in the broad places; how long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity and scoffers delight themselves in scoffing? Turn ye at my reproof. Because I have called and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man hath regarded, but ye have set at naught all my counsel and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh in the day of your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh." Have mercy upon us, oh, God! according to Thy loving kindness. Be not this our condemnation. Pity us rather in our ignorance, in our infirmities. Take us not away in Thy long-suffering, but forgive the iniquity of Thy people and cause Thine indignation toward us to cease, and quicken us again, and grant us Thy salvation. Be not to us wrath, but refuge.

"Hide me, oh, my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life be past.

"Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

Put far from us the rebellious spirit, the defiant mood. Grant us the submissive hearts of willing children. "For His wrath may soon be kindled, but blessed are all they that take refuge in Him."

# THE RICHES OF INFLUENCE

"Ye are the salt of the earth."—Matthew 5: 13.

X

## THE RICHES OF INFLUENCE

THERE is an old proverb which says, "Prevention is better than cure." It is easier to keep one's health than to have it restored. It is wiser to forestall trouble than to arrest it. A fence at the top of the precipice is more in keeping with reason than a hospital and a corps of nurses at the bottom. Chloride of sodium is a more valuable ingredient than chloride of lime.

This is the genius of salt. Salt is pungent, preventive, preservative, purifying. So, from the beginning, it has been a valuable commodity. How flat and insipid is food without salt! Indeed, to the Oriental, it was a sacred substance. Homer called it divine. Plato felt it must be a compound dear to the gods. Full oft covenants were made with it and consecrated by sacrifice. The Jews made use of it to an extent quite considerable in their religious worship. They used it partly because of its symbolism. It is a transparent crystalline mineral with certain weight, specific gravity, and solu-

bility. Electrolysis discloses the fact that it is composed of two elements, a metal known as sodium and a gas chlorine. Science tells us that it is an antiseptic. "Ye are the salt." "Ye are the light." Light is a disinfectant. Even the old Greeks understood the germicidal power of sunlight. They represent the sun god Apollo as slaying the foul monster Python, sprung from slime and darkness. But salt is not a germicide. It hath no power to change corruption into incorruption. It has virtue only to ward off mischief and enable purity to remain pure. When the surgeon is about to operate, he soaks his hands in a solution of permanganate of potash till they are stained a dull mahogany. Then he plunges them into another solution of oxalic acid. Next, he washes them in sterile water. Then he puts on rubber gloves that have been asepticised; these precautions being purely preventive. Just so salt, rubbed into the tissue of things, sweetens, counteracts infection, and saves from possible attack. It cleanses and gives a wholesome flavour to the lump. It does not wait till decomposition begins its demoralising mischief before asserting its aggressive presence and healthful ministry. It combats the intruder at the door, challenges his right of entrance, denies him footing, and

claims possession on the ground of title of entry.

Herein is suggested the principle of the present revolution in the practice of medicine; the idea being not to destroy the germs of disease, but to fortify the constitution against them; to make the organism exempt, to establish a power of resistance. The strategy of medical science to-day is better hygiene, the putting the body above par, and so conferring immunity from attack. It strengthens the fortifications and aims to keep the intruder without. But it does more. It puts up an offensive plan of campaign and makes occasional visits into the enemy's country, thus weakening his power of assault. What marvellous advances have been made in pathology through the ministry of precaution. Instance puerperal fever, that scourge once so fatal to motherhood, or diphtheria or tetanus or cerebro-spinal-meningitis. The serum treatment for rabies is a prophylactic measure. Smallpox was the dread of the Middle Ages. In the eighteenth century, it is claimed that eighty-five per cent. of the population of Europe were seized by it at some period of their lives. To-day the scourge is well-nigh stamped out. And, speaking of the protozoan type of diseases, a scientist of note has recently claimed that, if the mosquito

theory of yellow fever had not been established in 1900, the Panama Canal could never have progressed so rapidly. Dr. Osler has given us an article in the *American Magazine* for December, 1910, in which, among other things, he says: "How little do we appreciate what even a generation has done! The man is only just dead (Robert Koch) who gave to his fellow-men the control of cholera. Read the story of yellow fever in Havana and in Brazil if you wish to get an idea of the powers of experimental medicine; there is nothing to match it in the history of human achievement. Before our eyes to-day the most striking experiment ever made in sanitation is in progress. The digging of the Panama Canal was acknowledged to be a question of the health of the workers. For four centuries the Isthmus had been a white man's grave, and at one time, during the French control of the Canal, the mortality reached the appalling figures of 170 per thousand. Even under the most favourable circumstances it was extraordinarily high. Month by month I get the Reports which form, by far, the most interesting sanitary reading of the present day. Of more than 54,000 employees (about 13,000 of whom are white), the death-rate per thousand for the month of March was 8.91, a lower percentage, I believe,

than in any city in the United Kingdom, and very much lower than in any city in the United States."

Now, Christians are to be the salt of the earth. They are to be a counteractant to decay. They are to keep society from festering. Great is the art of healing disease, but even greater is becoming the art of preventing it. This does not displace Christianity as the one curative energy. For this it must ever be. Its founder is the Great Physician. The world is sick and only He can make it whole. He, and He alone, can restore the soul. But, while His mission is primarily redemptive, it must not be forgotten that it has a preventive ministry as well. Henry Drummond tells of a very earnest discussion in heaven. Two saints are debating which of them is the greatest monument of God's saving grace. The one had been a very wicked man who had repented on his deathbed and been snatched at the eleventh hour from the burning; the other had been a Christian all the way from childhood. One would have supposed that, of course, the former was the greater miracle of mercy. But, strange as it may seem, the listeners agree that the latter has most to be thankful for. Because, while it required infinite grace to save the veteran at the close of all his guilty orgies, it

required even more grace to preserve the other scathless throughout the tempted years. It is the great keeping power of God.

And the children of the Kingdom, too, are to be preservatives. They are to so conserve society that it shall be safe and sanitary. They are to turn aside visitation. There were kings of Israel who walked with Jehovah, so that the judgment of Heaven did not fall upon the people in their day. Was not Sodom destroyed because ten righteous men could not be found in it? Are we not to train up our little ones in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? And does not this imply the forestalling of infection and the panoply against peril?

How fruitful of illustration is the field! In a certain Western town, an epidemic of typhoid broke out. The trouble was traced to the milk supply. The free beds in the hospital were taxed to their utmost. The epidemic cost the city several thousand dollars. A bacteriological examination beforehand could have saved all this trouble. And, if the dairies are beginning to be watched, is not the drama worth inspection? The first criminal executed in the state of New York was a man by the name of Kemmler. Some one had an investigation made to find out what this uxoricide cost the state from the beginning of the tragedy up to

the day the button was pressed, and, all told, it footed up to something like one hundred thousand dollars. A casket at the beginning for Kemmler's wife, another at the end for Kemmler himself, detectives, courts, alienists, judges, juries, lawyers, appeals, and then an electric apparatus, all amounting to one hundred thousand dollars. And all this costly waste hatched in a saloon. Only the other day, in the city of Atlanta, the judge of the police court said, "I find that more than seventy-five per cent. of the cases of crime brought before me are the direct result of strong drink." But the facts are uncontested. They need no stressed insistence. Only, the half—aye, the tenth—has not been told. What would seem to be the wise plan of procedure? Must we fold our arms and watch this river of alcoholic poison flow by into its stagnant receptacle of death? Must we do nothing to check the mad momentum of the stream, growing ever greater and greater with its swollen tributaries? Is this Christian citizenship? Does the farmer wait until the meat spoils ere he applies the saline solution? Jordan, in his little book, "The Power of Truth," says that "nine-tenths of the world's misery is preventable." As at Balaklava, some one has blundered. The daily paper is the diary of the un-

necessary. The Johnstown flood was not an accident; it was a crime. And there are floods of pollution and foulness and vice and villainy flowing down our streets, like rivers when winter is broken. In the city of St. Louis, there is a man who has been a famous brewer for forty years, and who, during the last ten years, has maintained at his own expense a Keeley Institute; which some one compares to lighting a fire and then turning in the alarm, to see it extinguished. Napoleon filled France with graves, and then he scattered broadcast orphan asylums for the sons and daughters of those who had fallen in battle. And these asylums are pointed to to-day as an illustration of the love and thoughtfulness and humanity of the great Napoleon. This tribute to the man, mark, who once said to Prince Metternich when that general had objected that a certain campaign proposed would cost the lives of 100,000 men, "What are 100,000 men to me?" Another case of fire-extinguishing. How expert is society with the hose and the hydrant. Mayhap, if we took the matches away from our children, we would have fewer conflagrations.

There is one possibility hinted in the subjunctive clause of this passage which not unlikely strikes us with questioning and sceptical surprise. "If the salt have lost its savour."

Is this possible? Can salt lose its savour? Such seems, indeed, to have been the belief of the Jews. Thomson, in his "Land and Book," describes the sweeping out of salt that had lost its virtue, and the casting of it into the street. Salt that is perfectly pure does not, cannot, lose its savour, but the common commodity we purchase from the grocer is rarely pure. It is mixed with many earthly ingredients, and of this impoverished amalgam the words are true. It was so in Palestine. The salt found there was earthy, and when it had deteriorated it was good for naught. You could not scatter it on the field, because salt burns out the grass and grain and roots. There was nothing to do but to thrust it out, and make of it a roadbed on the public highway.

So the child of God is human. He is more or less worldly at best. He may lose his characteristic, his penetrating mark, his apartness from the world, his idiosyncrasy as a holy man, and then, alas! the saltness is gone. Of what use is he in the corporate body? He has lost the note of his Christian life. He has missed the intent of his effectual calling. He has mingled with the world, and the world has adulterated and impaired his excellence. He is a mere lump of common clay. He becomes a castaway from the Kingdom. Of what value

is a match that will not light, or a pen that will not write, or an automobile that will not go, or a watch that will not keep time? If a thing fails in the purpose for which it was manufactured, then it fails completely. It is good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. What a wonderful thing is the tongue, but, when the tongue loses its tang of truthfulness, it loses its witchery. When a woman loses the flower of her virtue, the bloom has departed. When the heart loses its fragrance of affection, the glory hath gone. How noble is enthusiasm, but, when enthusiasm forfeits the salt of sincerity, how spurious and worthless and distasteful! In "Rab and His Friends," we are told an incident of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Sir Joshua was taken to see a picture. Being anxious to admire it, he looked it over with keen but sympathetic regard. "Capital composition," he exclaimed: "correct drawing, colour tone chiaroscuro excellent, but—but—but it wants—hang it—it wants—that," snapping his fingers. Ah! it lacked the saltness. It lacked the living touch.

And, what of the Church? Is the Church to-day losing her Divine distinction? The saltness of the Church is her spirituality. She was appointed to be an elect race, a royal priest-

hood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. If the Church is meant for the saving of the world, and if she herself needs saving, what is going to be the issue? If the worldliness about us is ever to be disturbed, it will be by the unworldliness of the Christian communion. For no other institution even pretends to any leavening aloofness. And, if the light that ought to be the peculiar glory of that communion is darkness, how great is that darkness! I have heard it said, indeed, that the greatest problem before us to-day is how to convert the Church. The line of demarcation between the Church and the world, we are being told, has about become obliterated. The communion cup is swarming with deadly bacteria. This is somewhat of an alarming survey, but facts are advanced to vindicate the verdict. And some of them are significant and stubborn. Worldliness is the spirit of the world, and it is creeping into our once holy places to a sad and sorry and sordid extent. It is commercialising our shrines. It is secularising our sacraments. When the Church of Christ elects men to office because of their earthly possessions, she is losing her savour. When she judges the success of her ministers by her pew rentals, she is losing her savour. When the "multiplication table becomes more important than the

Communion table," she is losing her savour. When she is living for herself, she is losing her savour. Salt lives not for itself. In itself alone it is a valueless staple. The Church that is lukewarm is certain of censure. "I would ye were either cold or hot; but since thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." The Church that is exclusive is sure of reproof. The caste spirit in the Church is anathema. "Rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all." The commercial spirit in the Church is accursed. The Master flung the furniture down the front steps of the temple, saying as He did so, "My Father's house is a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves."

Let us take heed, beloved, and see to it that we lose not our appropriate and impregnating and enriching spice. If we are to be common salt, we must go in and out among the common people. Jesus is the Christ of common life. "The common people heard Him gladly." Are we fulfilling our duty to the community? When the Church loses her welcome to the unprivileged, then her salt has lost its sting. Salt must be rubbed into the tissue. We must get into touch with the masses. We must break down barriers. We are despatched to the highways and the hedges on a mission of con-

straining love. If the Church really wants sinners, there is not a shadow of a doubt but she can have them. We are to live in the world—in it, but not of it. "That ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life."

# THE RICHES OF REST

"Return unto thy rest, O my soul."—Psalm 116 : 7.

"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thy rest."—Luke 12 : 19.

## XI

## THE RICHES OF REST

THESE are monologues that two men hold with their souls. The Old Testament apostrophe is the cry of an exile in far-away Babylon, as he sighs for the gates of the Holy City and the steps of Jehovah's temple. He is in bondage in a strange land, and he pines for the peace and fellowship of home as the hart panteth after the water brook. It is a cry of real homesickness; "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." The second introspection is a chuckling soliloquy of satisfaction. The affluent lord is revelling in the midst of his storehouses. He has waxed fat by his wariness. His yield is large; his barns are bursting. So rapidly have his possessions come piling in, that he is confronted with the embarrassment of the sheltering of the surplus. After sober study, his plan mentally matures itself, and he has decided on pulling down and constructing on more commensurate lines. "Soul,

thou art plentifully supplied and secure for many years. Now take thy rest."

There are one or two touches most vivid, and manifestly intended, in our New Testament portrait, that it may be well at the outset to denote. How boldly interjected, for instance, is the consciousness of ownership! The Master has just been saying that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, but this rich churl, whose features he goes on to sketch, begins straightway to enlarge on the overflow of his assets. "My barns," "my fruits," "my goods," "my produce," "my soul." The egotism is intentionally pronounced. There is a self-handshaking that is far from pleasing. "Shall I take my bread and my water and my flesh, that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, of whom I know not whence they are?" It is the inadmirable vanity of the mirror. Then how myopic and purblind the outlook! The philosophy is that of the Epicurean, only that the reason annexed lacks the sweep and foresight of the old Greek voluptuary. "For to-morrow we die," was the voice of the sage. "For there be many years," is the logic of folly. Then, too, how suggestive the wording! "Take thine ease." His ease is a release. He purposeth in his heart

emancipation from all worries worldly. But it is also an indulgence. He covets a chance for the culture of the carnal. Rest, eat, drink, enjoy, he advocates, as the quartette of blissful living. But he hopes for even more, and this it is that lends the deep-seated pathos to the portrait. He uses the same word that the Master employs in His tender gracious welcome to the weary. "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you *rest.*" Paul uses the word twice, to indicate spiritual refreshment. Ease! Heart's ease! He quite seriously anticipates repose of spirit. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

Here, then, are two philosophies of rest. Rest in goods, and rest in God. There can be little question that the unit by which well-nigh everything is gauged to-day is the former. The ambition of the old Greeks was to know. Their supreme aim was wisdom. Their crowning institution, an institution of learning—the Academy, the Lyceum, the Porch. Athens, a much smaller city than New York, was the world's intellectual centre. We do not forget, of course, that in their temples of fame are found athletes and warriors. But

the conspicuous niches were not consecrated to a Themistocles or a Hercules, but to a Homer, a Socrates, a Plato, an Aristotle, a Herodotus, an Æschylus, a Thucydides. Greece gazed hungry-eyed on the banquet of knowledge. The pabulum was mental. But to-day the gauge of measurement is material. It is purple, and fine linen, and sumptuous fare, and bonds, and bills receivable that men's appetites crave. The cult of the stomach is more in vogue than the culture of the mind. That was a clever comment of Thoreau's, "I cannot buy a blank book any more to write thoughts in; they are all ruled for dollars and cents."

And the pathos of the pursuit is its purpose. Men are endeavouring, and hoping, in this way, to find rest for the soul. George Kennan, in his "Tent Life in Siberia," tells a story about his field-glass. He says, "I shall never forget the utter astonishment with which a band of natives once looked through my field-glass. I gave the glass to one of them, and told him to look through it at another native, who chanced to be working out on the plain, perhaps 500 yards away. The expression of blank surprise on his face," says Mr. Kennan, "was very amusing. He thought that the glass had actually transported the other man physically, to within a few feet of where he

stood. And as he kept looking through it, he stretched out his hand to touch him." And how many there are to-day, who are doing thus-wise, with the spiritual. They are using their possessions, as a glass, to bring its peace and happiness within easy grasp, forgetting all the while, that the spiritual is not a remote and distal beatitude, and even though it were that it could not be seen through a visible instrument, being itself invisible; the medium is irrelevant and opaque. Microscopes used for seeing molecules are of no avail for seeing motives. Science converts gases into liquids, liquids into solids, motion into heat, heat into motion, but one thing Science has not yet fulfilled. She has not converted riches into rest nor possessions into peace. She has so far failed to transmute economic standards into soul assets. No spiritual alchemy has effected this. To our Lord in the wilderness the Tempter said, " Command that these stones be made bread." It was a bait addressed to the appetite. Use Thy divine power to satisfy the flesh. To which the Master replied, " Man shall not live by bread alone." And it is the crowning peril of the age. Men are trying to live on bread alone. It is what the old prophet described as " feeding on ashes." " Covetousness, which is idolatry." What are ashes?

Ashes are the relics that remain after everything useful has been consumed. "Everything in this world that will not burn is something that has been burned already." Only Satan can feed upon ashes. Was not this the sentence pronounced? "Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." Man cannot be nourished on the meat which perisheth. His spirit must be fed. He needs the living bread, which cometh down from Heaven and giveth life unto the world.

The passion to-day, alas! is for things. The keyword of the age is *more*. Things are graded by their bigness. Nothing imports but dividends. To have more than one's neighbour is the ultimate of contentful living. We build mammoth mansions, whose very vastness overwhelms. The home is lost in the house. We imprison ourselves in palaces, and become serfs, not kings, as the spider is sometimes tangled in his own web. The body fares sumptuously, but the poor lean heart is pinched and famished. There is a plant in South Africa called the Nardoo plant. Its fruit is delicious. It satisfies the hunger, but it does not nourish the blood. Those who feed on it die of starvation. And much like this is our present-day passion for the earthly. One of the highest ladies in the social world said

but recently, that " Extravagance is a passport into society." However this may be, it is certainly not a passport into peace. We have a new pessimism to-day—the pessimism that is born of luxury. It has reduced lassitude and ennui to a fine art. Society to-day is living a feverish life, and the poor patient languishes. She cannot eat! She cannot sleep! She cannot work! She cannot rest! Everything is wrong, because she is wrong. There is an old Greek legend, that after the death of Orpheus, his lyre floated down " the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore." It was picked up by a fisherman who, not knowing what the strange instrument was, cut the strings, and used them for the mending of his nets. The framework he utilized in the building of a fire, to cook the fish which he caught. That surely was a piteous tragedy, worthy of Melpomene's Muse. But the man who takes the harp of life, and cuts the strings thereof, and makes of it a mesh for greedy grasping, then sets his passions on fire and feeds his body and turns it into a trough for gratification, and gorge, and gluttony—that is a more piteous tragedy. That is as though our noble Museum, so rich in treasures, was converted into a stable. That is the devastation of the city of Man-Soul. It is the fulfilment of Madame du

Châtelet's astonishing estimate, when she wrote in her diary, that "we have nothing else to do in this world but to obtain agreeable sensations." Or, of Catherine Sforza's deliverance, when she exclaimed, "Eat, sleep, gratify your lust—all else is little worth." Last summer up on the Saguenay River, I watched the fishermen fishing with drugs. And this is fishing with drugs. These are they of whom Jesus speaks, when He says, "Thou fool, . . so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

"Thou hast much goods laid up"; now sit down and enjoy them. It is the rationale of the worldling. But the order of the old prophet is otherwise; "Why spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." A man's life consisteth in what he is, not what he has. And if we are souls, how puerile to hope for satisfaction in things. Is it not passing and puzzling strange that the only thing about us that we are not afraid of losing is the only thing we possess that is priceless? "Hear and your soul shall live." Madame de Chantal cried, "There is something in me that has never been satisfied." It is the cry of the deep within. Give a man

all the goods he wanted, and it would be his hungriest moment. As Voltaire once remarked, " Man is ever in search of something more." I believe in food because I am famishing. And I believe in Christ because I am weary. If this bank does not exist, then I am bankrupt truly. Verily, indeed, nothing about the great Teacher so convinces me of His unearthliness as His standard of estimates. When I walk in His company, I am travelling in a foreign country. The coinage is different, the values, the vernacular. With Him the heart is the gold measure. His beatitudes are for the poor, the pure, the meek, the mournful, the merciful. Every time the crown falls it reveals the royalty of the inner life. The feeling that grips me when I study the life of this man, is that all the many comforts He did not have were not really essential. He would have been nothing the happier had He had them all. The body mattered little, it was the soul of things He coveted. How does one front duty in the morning? Is there a sense of renewal in the fresh greeting of the dawn? What are the feelings of the heart in the struggle for bread and butter? What spirit do we carry in the noonday of prosperity? How do we bear up under the head winds of adversity? When the earthly windows are darkened, is

there any glimpse of the land that is afar off, and the peaks of the Eternal City of Light? What is our attitude toward little children? Is there an encouragement in our tone that warms each young enthusiasm? Is there a growing tenderness of eye, and voice, and word, and judgment, and feeling? Is the greatest sorrow of the world to us its sin? Are we keeping the gloss and polish on our immortal natures? Is there a purity of imagination that thinks nothing unclean? Are we mastering life's greatest lesson, that we need God? What effect has our outward circumstance on our inward life? Are integrity and uprightness grounded on the Eternal Righteousness? These are the great issues. These are the things that count. Ah, we have such an inordinate and over-developed bump for belittling great things, and for greatening little things!

But rest is not found by way of fruits and goods, according to the Psalmist. Rest is not found in accumulation or aggrandisement. This way lies worry. This is looking down a gold mine for a star. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." Return. Then there has been a wandering. We have drifted away from the rest-centre. At the heart of the cyclone there is a point of perfect peace. All is quiet there,

while without is convulsion, and ferment, and havoc, and waste, and ruin. And our trouble is in abiding at the circumference of things. The pitch and tilt of the vessel is not felt amidship as it is in the stern, or the bow. How fast the rim of the carriage wheel revolves! How slowly the axle moves! If we live near the centre we will be troubled but little with the shock of the world's disquiet. In the centre of the storm, Christ can have His temple of peace. In the push of a great mob, surging into a building for a seat, it is foolish to say, "I will keep still." But it is wise to say, "I will keep calm." Rest is not stillness; it is calmness. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee." Ah, but let it be borne in mind that it was in the hour of besiegement and battle that this song was sung. Perhaps it is worth noting that the word rest in our text is plural. "Return unto thy rests, O my soul." It is the plural of intensity. It is the cry of a tempest-tossed man, seeking foothold and anchorage. The soul of Israel can never be at peace until it is sheltered beneath the shadow of its eternal home. Nor can we. Unrest comes from making self the centre. Rest comes from making Christ the centre. "These things have I spoken unto you that *in Me* ye may have peace." Home is life's

social point of convergence. The business man goes out in the morning to the call of labour. He returns at night to the sweet sanctity of rest. And God is our home.

> "Our God, our help in ages past,
> Our hope for years to come;
> Our shelter from the stormy blast,
> And our Eternal Home."

Then it is *thy* rest. "Jehovah preserveth the simple. I was brought low, and He saved me." So the prodigal was brought low, when he strayed into the far country. He found no place of repentance till he turned his steps to the old fireside and the Father. No matter how deep down he had fallen, he was his father's boy still. The filial likeness may have been defaced, but it never could have been effaced. There were strong family lines that were inerasable. The old home was his still, even though he had wandered. As St. Bernard puts it, "The fine gold may become dim, but it is still gold." "My Father," he cries. "This, my son, was dead." "Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet *Your* Heavenly Father feedeth them." God is never called the Father of fowls. "Unto which of the Angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son." God is never called the Father of

Angels. God is the Father of the human Spirit. He is the home of the human Soul. He is the soul's rest-centre! Thy rest! Thine own! Thy very own! Heart of mine, claim thy birthright! "Return unto thy rest, O my soul!"

In that masterly allegory of Maeterlinck's, "The Blue-bird," this is the rock-bottom truth that is enforced. It is a message to the restless spirit of the age. The central idea is the quest of the soul, and that is more than happiness; it is righteousness; it is joy; it is peace; it is the eternal facts of the spiritual order. The children in their search travel afar into the land of memory, then on into the unborn future, but the bird is found only when they return to their own humble cottage. When Tiltyl arrives home, and takes the dove from its little wicker cage, and gives it to the sick child, it turns straightway to blue. "Hullo! Why, he's blue; he's my turtle-dove. We went so far to find him, and he was right here all the while." The bird became blue when they gave it away. The secret was not in possessing, but in sharing. The blue-bird in the land of Memory turned black, the one in the land of Hope turned pink. They changed colour when they were caged. And the one in the forest could not be caught.

How true of life! Everything changes colour when it is caged. Hoard a blessing, and it will straightway begin to lose its lustre. Lay up treasure on earth, and moth and rust will instantly begin their cankering mischief. The blue-bird of rest is not found afar, nor in luxuries, nor in accumulation, nor in vaults, nor in any species of confinement, nor in any search—it matters not how successful. The end of the mountain climb is so often a cold, barren, cheerless peak, with rocks and shrubbery shutting out even the view. As Light remarks to Tiltyl, "These are dangerous and will break your will." It is found in returning. It is found far back in the crib, in the cottage, in the nursery of childhood. It is found in simple household joys. We must become as little children if we would enter this kingdom. "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest." Nay, nay, this is the cry of a coward, who would fain shirk his duty. He was not looking heavenward, but earthward, when this longing leaped from his lips. "Return," rather, "unto thy rest, O my soul." "For thus saith the Lord, in returning and rest shall ye be saved."

In that beautiful story of Henry W. Grady, we are told how from the disillusionment of

his editorial ambitions he one day harked back to the home of his boyhood to spend a few days with his aged mother. He asked her to just let him play the boy again around the old barn. "Let me say my prayers, mother, just as I did when I was a child." And for two or three weeks he was born again, into the richness and zest and glory of childhood. And, says Grady, speaking of it afterwards, "My vision was restored." It is the vision of the poet.

> "Backward, turn backward, oh Time, in thy flight,
> Make me a child again just for to-night."

"Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him *return* unto the Lord." "For ye were going astray like sheep, but are now *returned* unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." How beautiful the word! I wonder not that Faber, speaking of it, says, "Let us linger here a moment and suck the honeycomb." So many are spending their lives chasing rest. Foolish people! As if we could ever find rest by chasing it. The cure for care is not to travel around the globe, but to penetrate to the heart of its divine purpose and meaning. Rest is not something to

be chased and imprisoned. It is something to be received. "Wait upon the Lord, and He shall strengthen thine heart." It is a gift offered for the asking. It is not in Europe; it is at thy feet; it is following thine every footstep. It is a legacy. It is a guest knocking for entrance. Receive the rest-Giver. A bottle with a cork in it cannot be filled by the ocean. Open thine heart to thine heart's Master. "Intoxicate yourselves by all means," says Baudelaire, "but with virtue, not wine." Pile up possessions, but let them be the possessions of the interior life. "Turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." Back to the rest-centre. Lean on the rest-Giver. Jesus is the pillow for a weary world. Leave the outskirts. Come to the central shrine, the secret place, the habitation of holiness and quiet. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." In childhood I have seen hens hatching the eggs of ducks. Then when the little duckling came out of the shell, and heard the cry of its own mother, by a marvellous instinct it flew to her, and took refuge under her wing. So man, outside of God, is a motherless bird. He needs the breast of Deity, on which to lie. He is never truly homed until he is homed in the Eternal. "Oh

God, Thou hast created me for Thyself," and I can never find the blessed blue-bird of peace, until I find it in Thee.

> " Jesus, lover of my soul,
> Let me to thy bosom fly."

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